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# AN OCEAN TRAGEDY

BY

W. CLARK RUSSELL

AUTHOR OF 'THE FROZEN PIRATE' 'THE WRECK OF THE GROSVENOR'  
'A BOOK FOR THE HAMMOCK' 'THE ROMANCE OF  
JENNY HARLOWE' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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# AN OCEAN TRAGEDY.

## CHAPTER I.

### MY COUSIN.

‘SIR WILFRID MONSON, sir,’ exclaimed my man.

It was half-past ten o’clock at night, and I was in my lodgings in Bury Street, St. James, slippers on feet, a pipe of tobacco in my hand, seltzer and brandy at my elbow, and on my knees the ‘Sun’ newspaper, the chief evening sheet of the times.

‘Sir Wilfrid Monson, sir.’

My cousin! thought I, starting, and looking round at my man with a fancy in me for a moment that he had got the wrong name. ‘Show him in.’

Sir Wilfrid entered in a sort of swift headlong way, full of nervousness and passion, as was to be seen easily enough; and then he came to a dead stop with a wild look round the room, as if to

make sure that I was alone, and a frowning stare at my servant, who was lingering a moment on the threshold as though suddenly surprised out of his habits of prompt sleek attendance by a fit of astonishment.

He stood about six feet high ; he had a slight stoop, and was something awkward in arms and legs ; yet you were sensible of the indefinable quality of breeding in him the moment your eye took in his form and face, uncommon as both were. He was forty-four years of age at this time, and looked fifty. His hair was long and plentiful, but of an iron grey streaked with soft white. He had a protruding under-lip, and a nose, which might have been broken for the irregularity of its outline, with unusually high-cut nostrils. His eyes were large, short-sighted, and grey, luminous and earnest, but with a tremulous lid that seemed to put a quivering into their expression that was a hint in its way of cunning and mental weakness. He had a broad, intellectual forehead, brilliantly white teeth, high cheek bones, a large heavy chin, rounding into a most delicately moulded throat. He was a man, indeed, at whom, as a stranger, one might catch one's self staring as at something sufficiently puzzling to be well worth resolving. Ill-looking he was *not*, and yet one seemed to seek in vain for qualities of

body or mind to neutralise to the sight what was assuredly a combination of much that was uncomely, and indeed, in one or two directions, absolutely grotesque. But then I had the secret.

The long and short of it was, my cousin, Sir Wilfrid Monson, was not entirely straight-headed. Everything was made clear to the mind, after a glance at his strange, weak, yet striking profile, with the hint that there had been madness in his mother's family. He was the eighth baronet, and on his father's side (and that was my side, I am thankful to say) all had been sound as a bell; but my uncle had fallen in love with the daughter of a Scotch peer whose family were tainted with insanity—no matter her real name: the Lady Elizabeth will suffice. He was frankly warned by the old Earl, who was not too mad to be candid, but the lovesick creature grinned in his lordship's face with a wild shake of the head at the disclosure, as though he saw no more in it than a disposition to end the engagement. Then the honest old madman carried him to a great window that overlooked a spacious sweep of lawn, and pointed with a bitter smile and a despairful heave of the shoulders to three women walking, two of whom were soberly clad in big bonnets and veils down their back, whilst the third, who was between them, and whose arms were locked

in the others', glided forwards as though her feet travelled on clockwork rollers, whilst she kept her head fixedly bent, her chin upon her breast, and her gaze rooted upon the ground; and as the amorous baronet watched—the Earl meanwhile preserving his miserable smile as he held his gouty forefinger levelled—he saw the down-looking woman make an effort to break away from her companions, but without ever lifting her head.

‘That’s Lady Alice,’ said the Earl, ‘speechless and brainless! Guid preserve us! And the Lady Elizabeth is her seester.’

‘Ay, that may be,’ answers the other; ‘but take two roses growing side by side: because some venomous worm is eating into the heart of one and withering up its beauty, is the other that is radiant and flawless to be left uncherished?’

‘Guid forbid!’ answered the Earl, and then turned away with a weak *hech! hech!* that should have proved more terrifying to one’s matrimonial yearnings than even the desolate picture of the three figures stalking the emerald-green sward.

These were dim memories, yet they flashed into my head with the swiftness of thought, along with the workings of the eager conjecture and lively wonder raised in me by Wilfrid’s visit, and by his peculiar aspect, too, during the few mo-

ments' interval of pause that followed his entrance. My servant shut the door; Wilfrid looked to see that it was closed, then approached me with a sort of lifting of his face as of a man half choked with a hurry and passion of sentences which he wants to be quit of all at once in a breath, staggering as he moved, his right arm outstretched with a rapid vibration of the hand at the wrist; and, without delivering himself of a syllable, he fell into a chair near the table, dashing his hat to the floor as he did so, buried his face in his arms, and so lay sobbing in respirations of hysteric fierceness.

This extraordinary behaviour amazed and terrified me. I will not deny that I at first suspected the madness that lurked as a poison in his blood had suddenly obtained a strong hold, and that he had come to see me whilst seized with a heavy fit. I put down my pipe and adopted a steadier posture, so to speak, in my chair, secretly hoping that the surprise his manner or appearance had excited in my valet would render the fellow curious enough to hang about outside to listen to what might pass at the start. I kept my eyes fixed upon my cousin, but without offering to speak, for, whatever might be the cause of the agitation that was convulsing his powerful form with deep sobbing breathings, the emotion was too overwhelming to be broken in upon by

speech. Presently he looked up, his eyes were tearless, but his face was both dusky and haggard with the anguish that worked in him.

‘In the name of Heaven, Wilfrid,’ I cried, witnessing intelligence enough in his gaze to instantly relieve me from the dread that had possessed me, ‘what is wrong with you? what has happened?’

He drew a long tremulous breath and essayed to speak, but was unintelligible in the broken syllable or two he managed to utter. I poured what sailors term a ‘two-finger nip’ of brandy into a tumbler, and added a little seltzer water to the dram. He seized the glass with a hand that shook like a drunkard’s, and emptied it. But the draught steadied him, and a moment after he said in a low voice, while he clasped his hands upon the table with such a grip of each other that the veins stood out like whipcord: ‘My wife has left me.’

I stared at him stupidly. The disclosure was so unexpected, so wildly remote from any conclusion my fears had arrived at, that I could only look at him like a fool.

‘Left you!’ I faltered, ‘what d’ye mean, Wilfrid? Refused to live with you?’

‘No!’ he exclaimed with a face darkening yet to the effort it cost him to subdue his voice, ‘she



has eloped—left me—left her baby for—for—’ he stopped, bringing his fist to the table with a crash that was like to have demolished everything upon it.

‘It is an abominable business,’ said I soothingly; ‘but it is not to be bettered by letting feeling overmaster you. Come, take your time; give yourself a chance. You are here, of course, to tell me the story. Let me have it quietly. It is but to let yourself be torn to pieces to suffer your passion to jockey your reason.’

‘She has left me!’ he shrieked, rising bolt upright from his chair, and lifting his arms with his hands clenched to the ceiling. ‘Devil and beast! faithless mother! faithless wife! May God——’

I raised my hand, looking him full in the face. ‘Pray sit, Wilfrid. Lady Monson has left you, you say. With or for whom?’

‘Hope-Kennedy,’ he answered, ‘Colonel Hope-Kennedy,’ bringing out the words as though they were rooted in his throat. ‘My good friend Hope-Kennedy, Charles; the man I have entertained, have hunted with, assisted at a time when help was precious to him. Ay, Colonel Hope-Kennedy. That is the man she has left me for, the fellow that she has abandoned her baby for. It is a dream—it is a dream! I loved her so. I

could have kissed her breast, where her heart lay, as a Bible for truth, sincerity, and all beautiful thought.'

He passed his hand over his forehead and seated himself again, or rather dropped into his chair, resting his chin upon the palm of his hand with the nails of his fingers at his teeth, whilst he watched me with a gaze that was rendered indescribably pathetic by the soft near-sighted look of his grey eyes under the shadow of his forehead, that had a wrinkled, twisted, even distorted aspect with the pain his soul was in. There was but one way of giving him relief, and that was by plying him with questions to enable him to let loose his thoughts. He extended his hand for the brandy and mixed himself a bumper. There was little in spirits to hurt him at such a time as this. Indeed I believe he could have carried a whole bottle in his head without exhibiting himself as in the least degree overspurred. This second dose distinctly rallied him, and now he lay back in his chair with his arms folded upon his breast.

'When did your wife leave you, Wilfrid?'

'A week to-day.'

'You know, of course, without doubt, that Hope-Kennedy is the man she has gone off with?'

He nodded savagely with a smile like a scowl passing over his face.



‘But how do you know for certain?’ I cried, determined to make him talk.

He pulled a number of letters from his side-pocket, overhauled them, found one, glanced at it, and handed it to me with a posture of the arm that might have made one think it was some venomous snake he held.

‘This was found in my wife’s bedroom,’ said he, ‘read it to yourself. Every line of it seems to be written in fire here.’ He struck his breast with his fist.

What I am telling happened a long time ago, as you will notice presently. The letter my cousin handed to me I read once and never saw again, and so, as you may suppose, I am unable to give it as it was written. But the substance of it was this: It was addressed to Lady Monson. The writer called her, I recollect, my darling, my adorable Henrietta. It was all about the proposed elopement, a complete sketch of the plan of it, and the one document Sir Wilfrid could have prayed to get hold of, had he any desire to know what had become of his wife, and on what kind of rambles she and her paramour had started. The letter was signed, boldly enough, ‘Frank Hope-Kennedy,’ and was filled with careful instructions to her how and when to leave her house. Railroads were few and far between in those days.

Sir Wilfrid Monson's estate was in Cumberland, and it was a long journey by coach and chaise to the town that was connected with the metropolis by steam. But the Colonel had made every arrangement for her ladyship, and it was apparent from his instructions that she had managed her flight first by driving to an adjacent village, where she dismissed the carriage with orders for it to return for her at such and such an hour; then, when her coachman was out of sight, she entered a postchaise that was in readiness and galloped along to a town through which the stage coach passed. By this coach she would travel some twenty or thirty miles, then post it to the terminus of the line that conveyed her to London. But all this, though it ran into a tedious bit of description, was but a part of the gallant Colonel's programme. Her ladyship would arrive in London at such and such an hour, and the Colonel would be waiting at the station to receive her. They would then drive to a hotel out of Bond Street, and next morning proceed to Southampton, where the 'Shark' lay ready for them. It was manifest that Colonel Hope-Kennedy intended to sail away with Lady Monson in a vessel named the 'Shark.' He devoted a page of small writing to a description of this craft, which, I might take it—though not much in that way was to be gathered from a

landsman's statement—was a large schooner yacht owned by Lord Winterton, from whom the Colonel had apparently hired it for an indefinite period. He assured his adorable Henrietta that he had spared neither money nor pains to render the vessel as luxurious in *cuisine*, cabin fittings, and the like as was practicable in a sea-going fabric in those days. He added that what his darling required for the voyage must be hastily purchased at Southampton. She must be satisfied with a very slender wardrobe ; time was pressing ; the madman to whom the clergyman who married them had shackled her would be off in wild pursuit, helter-skelter, flying moonwards mayhap in his delirium on the instant of discovering that she was gone. Time therefore pressed, and when once the anchor of the ' Shark ' was lifted off the ground he had no intention of letting it fall again until they had measured six thousand miles of salt water.

I delivered a prolonged whistle on reading this. Six thousand miles of ocean, methought, sounded intolerably real as a condition of an elopement. My cousin never removed his eyes from my face while I read. I gave him the letter, which he folded and returned to his pocket. He was now looking somewhat collected, though the surging of the passion and grief in him would

show in a momentary sparkle of the eye, in a spasmodic grin and twist of the lips, in a quick clenching of his hands as though he would drive his finger nails into his palms. I hardly knew what to say, for the letter was as full a revelation of the vile story as he could have given me in an hour's delivery, and the injury and misery of the thing were too recent to admit of soothing words. Yet I guessed that it would do him good to talk.

‘Have they sailed yet, do you know?’ I inquired.

‘Yes,’ he answered, letting out his breath in a sigh as though some thought in him had arrested his respiration for a bit.

‘How do you know?’

‘I arrived an hour ago from Southampton,’ he replied, ‘and have got all the information I require.’

‘There cannot be much to add to what the letter contains,’ said I; ‘it is the completest imaginable story of the devilish business.’

He looked at me oddly, and then said, ‘Ay, it tells what has happened. But that did not satisfy me. I have gone beyond that, and know the place they are making for.’

‘It will be six thousand miles distant, anyhow,’ said I.

‘Quite. The villain reasoned with a pair of

compasses in his hand. It is Cape Town—the other side of the world; when 'tis ice and northern blasts with us, it is the fragrance of the moon-lily and a warm heaven of quiet stars with them.'

He struck the table, smothering some wild curse or other behind his set teeth, next leaped from his chair and fell to pacing the room, now and again muttering to himself with an occasional flourish of his arm. I watched him in silence. Presently he returned to the table and mixed another glass of liquor. He sat lost in thought for a little, then with a slow lifting of his eyes, till his gaze lay steadfast on me, he said: 'Charlie, I am going to follow them to Cape Town.'

'In some South African trader?'

'In my yacht. You know her?'

'I have never seen her, but I have heard of her as a very fine vessel.'

'She sails two feet to the "Shark's" one,' he exclaimed, with a queer gleam of satisfaction glistening in the earnest stare he kept fastened on me. 'I gave her square yards last year—you will know what a great hoist of topsail, and a big squaresail under it, and a large topgallant-sail should do for such a model as the "Bride." The "Shark" is fore and aft only.' He fetched his leg a smack that sounded like the report of a

pistol. 'We'll have 'em!' he exclaimed, and his face turned pale as he spoke the words.

'Let me understand you,' said I; 'you propose to sail in pursuit of the Colonel and your wife?'

He nodded whilst he clasped his hands upon the table and leaned forward.

'What proof have you that they have started for Cape Town?'

He instantly answered: 'The captain of the "Shark" is a man named Fidler. My captain's name is Finn. His wife and Mrs. Fidler are neighbours at Southampton, and good friends. Mrs. Fidler told my captain's wife that her husband was superintending the equipment of Lord Winterton's yacht for a voyage round the world, and that the first port of call would be Table Bay. She knew that the "Shark" had been let by Winterton to a gentleman, but at the time of her speaking to Mrs. Finn she did not know his name.'

'You said just now,' I exclaimed, 'that you had assisted this fellow Hope-Kennedy when help was precious to him. I suppose you mean that you lent him money? How can he support the expense of a yacht, for, if I remember rightly, the "Shark's" burthen is over two hundred tons?'

'I lent him money before I was married; within the last three years he has come into a



fortune of between eighty and a hundred thousand pounds.'

I paused a moment and then said, 'Have you thoroughly considered this project of chasing the fugitives?'

His eyes brightened to a sudden rage, but he checked the utterance of what rose to his lips and said with a violent effort to subdue himself: 'I start the day after to-morrow.'

'Alone?'

'No, my sister-in-law will accompany me; ' then, after a breath or two, '*and you.*'

'I?'

'Oh,' he cried, 'it would be ridiculous in me to expect you to say at once that you will come; but before I leave this room I shall have your promise.' And as he said this he stretched his arms across the table and took my hand in both his and fondled it, meanwhile eyeing me in the most passionate, wistful manner that can be imagined.

'Wilfrid,' said I softly, touched by his air and a sort of beauty as I seemed to think that came into his strange face with the pleading of it, 'whatever I can do that may be serviceable to you in this time of bitter trial, I *will* do. But let me reason with you a little.'

'Ay, reason,' he responded, relinquishing my

hand and folding his arms, and leaning back in his chair.

‘I have been a sailor in my time, as you know,’ said I, ‘and have some acquaintance with the sea, even though my experience goes no further than a brief spell of East African and West Indian stations; and, therefore, forgive me for inquiring your expectations. What do you suppose? The “Shark” will have had three days’ start of you.’

‘Five days,’ he interrupted.

‘Five days then. Do you expect to overhaul her at sea, or is it your intention to crowd on to the Cape, await her arrival there, or, if you find that she has already sailed, to follow her to the next port, providing you can learn it?’

‘You have named the programme,’ he answered. ‘I shall chase her. If I miss her I shall wait for her at Table Bay.’

‘She may get there before you,’ I said, ‘and be under way for another destination whilst you are still miles to the nor’ard.’

‘No,’ he cried hotly, ‘we shall be there first; but we shall not need to go so far. Her course must be our course, and we shall overhaul her; don’t doubt that.’

‘But put it,’ said I, ‘first of all, that you *don’t* overhaul her. You may pass her close on a dark



night with never a guess at her presence. She may be within twenty miles of you on a clear, bright day, and not a creature on board suspect that a shift of helm by so much as half a point would bring what all hands are dying to overhaul within eyeshot in half an hour.'

He listened with a face clouded and frowning with impatience; but I was resolved to weaken if I could what seemed to me an insane resolution.

'Count upon missing her at sea, for I tell you the chances of your picking her up are all against you. Well, now, you arrive at Table Bay and find that the "Shark" sailed a day or two before for some port of which nobody knows anything. What will you do then? How will you steer your "Bride?" For all you can tell, this man Hope-Kennedy may make for the Pacific Islands by way of Cape Horn, or he may head north-east for the Mozambique and the Indian waters, or south-east for the Australias. It is but to let fly an arrow in the dark to embark on such a quest.'

He lay back looking at me a little without speaking, and then said, in a more collected manner than his face might promise, 'I *may* miss this man upon the high seas; I *may* find his yacht has arrived and gone again when I reach Table

Bay; and I *may not* know, as you say, in what direction to seek her if there be no one in Cape Town able to tell me what port she has started for; but '—he drew a deep breath—' the pursuit gives me a chance. You will admit that?'

'Yes, a chance, as you say.'

'A chance,' he continued, 'that need not keep me waiting long for it to happen. D'ye think I could rest with the knowledge that that scoundrel and the woman he has rendered faithless to me are close yonder?' he exclaimed, pointing as though there had come a vision of the Atlantic before his mind's eye and he saw the yacht afloat upon it. 'Who's to tell me that before the month is out our friend the Colonel will not be drifting somewhere fathoms deep with a shot through his heart?'

'If you catch him you will shoot him?'

'Oh yes.'

'And Lady Monson?'

He looked down upon his hands without answering.

'I am a single man,' said I, 'and am, therefore, no doubt disqualified from passing an opinion. But I vow to heaven, Wilfrid, if my wife chose to leave me for another man, I would not lift a finger either to regain her or to avenge myself. A divorce would fully appease me.'

Who would not feel gay to be rid of a woman whose every heart-throb is a dishonour? What more unendurable than an association rendered an incomparable insult, and the basest lie under heaven, by one's wife's secret abhorrence and her desire for another?'

On a sudden he sprang to his feet as though stabbed. 'Cease for Christ's sake!' he shouted. 'The more truthful your words are, the more they madden me. If I could tear her from me,' clutching at his breast in a wild, tragical way—'if I could cleanse my heart of her as you would purify a vessel of what has lain foul and poisonous in it; if disgust would but fall cool on my resentment and leave me loathing her merely; if—if—if! But it is *if* that makes the difference betwixt hell and heaven in this bad world of unexpected things.' He sat afresh, passing the back of his hand over his brow, and sighing heavily. 'There is no *if* for me,' said he. 'I love her passionately yet, and so hate her besides that——' He checked himself with a shake of the head. 'No, no, perhaps not when it *came* to it,' he muttered as though thinking aloud. 'We are wasting time,' he cried, pulling out his watch. 'Charlie, you will accompany me?'

'But you say you start the day after tomorrow?'

‘ Yes.’

‘ From Southampton ?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ And, should you find the “ Shark ” gone when you arrive at the Cape——’

‘ Well ?’

‘ Ay,’ said I, ‘ that’s just it. We should be like Adam and Eve, with all the world before us where to choose.’

‘ Charlie, will you come? I counted upon you from the moment of forming my resolution. You have been a sailor. You are the one man of them all that I should turn to in such a time as this. Say you will come. Laura Jennings, my wife’s—my—my sister-in-law I mean—will accompany us. Did I tell you this? Yes; I recollect. She is a stout-hearted little woman, as brave as she is beautiful, and so shocked, so shocked!’ He clasped his hands upon his brow, lifting his eyes. ‘ She would pass through a furnace to rescue her sister from this infamy. Come!’

‘ You give me no time.’

‘ Time! You have all to-morrow. You may easily be on board by four o’clock in the afternoon on the following day. Time! A sailor knows nothing of time. I must have you by my side, Charlie. We shall meet them, and I shall

need a friend. The support and help of your company too——’

‘Will your yacht be ready for sea by the day after to-morrow?’

‘She is ready now.’

‘Your people will have worked expeditiously,’ said I, fencing a little, for he was leaning towards me and devouring me with his eyes, and I found it impossible to say yes or no right off.

‘Will you come?’

‘How many form your party?’

‘There is myself, there is Laura, then you, then a maid for my sister-in-law, and my man, and yours if you choose to bring him.’

‘In short, there will be three of us,’ said I; ‘no doctor?’

‘We cannot be too few. What would be the good of a doctor? Will you come?’

‘Do you sleep in town to-night?’

‘Yes,’ he replied, naming a hotel near Charing Cross.

‘Well then, Wilfrid,’ said I, ‘you must give me to-night to think the thing over. What are your plans for to-morrow?’

‘I leave for Southampton at ten. Laura arrives there at six in the evening.’

‘Then,’ said I, ‘you shall have my answer by

nine o'clock to-morrow morning. Will that do?'

'It *must* do, I suppose,' said he wearily, moving as if to rise, and casting a dull, absent sort of look at his watch.

A quarter of an hour later I was alone.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE BRIDE.

TIME was when I had been much thrown with my cousin. I had served in the Royal Navy for a few years, as I have said, but abandoned it on my inheriting a very comfortable little fortune from my father, who survived my mother a few months only. I say I quitted the sea then, partly because I was now become an independent man, partly because I was comparatively without influence and so found the vocation unpromising, and partly because my frizzling equatorial spells of service had fairly sickened me of the life.

It was then that Wilfrid, who was a bachelor, and my senior by some ten years or thereabouts, invited me down to Cumberland, where I hunted and shot with him and passed some merry weeks. He took a great liking to me, and I was often with him and we were much together in London. There came a time, however, when he took it into his head to travel. He thought he would go abroad and see the world ; not Paris, Brussels, and



Rome, but America and the Indies and Australia—a considerable undertaking in those ambling days of the tea waggon and the cotton kettle-bottom, when the passage from the Thames to Bombay occupied four months, and when a man who had made a voyage round the world believed he had a right to give himself airs.

Well, my cousin sailed; I went down to Gravesend with him and bade him good-bye there. His first start was for New York, and then he talked of proceeding to the West Indies and afterwards to the Cape, thence to India or Australia, and so on. He was away so long that the very memory of him grew dim in me, till one day I heard some men in a club that I belonged to speaking about the beautiful Lady Monson. I pricked up my ears at this, for Monson is my name and the word caught me instantly, and, gathering from the talk that one of the group, a young baronet with whom I was well acquainted, could satisfy my curiosity about the lady, I waited till he was alone and then questioned him.

He told me that Lady Monson was my cousin's wife; Sir Wilfrid had met her at Melbourne and married her there. She was the daughter of a squatter, a man of small beginnings, who had done amazingly well. She was exceedingly beautiful, my young friend assured me. He



had met her twice at county balls, and had never seen her like for dignity, grace, and loveliness of form and face. He told me that she was very fond of the sea, so some friends or acquaintances of hers had informed him, and that, to gratify her taste in this way, Sir Wilfrid sold his cutter—a vessel of twenty tons, aboard which I had made one or two excursions with him—and replaced her by a handsome schooner which he had rechristened the ‘Bride.’ I understood from the young baronet that my cousin and his wife were then away cruising in the Mediterranean.

I had not before heard of Wilfrid’s marriage, and, though for the moment I was a little surprised and perhaps vexed that he had never communicated so interesting a piece of news as this to me, who, as a blood relation and an intimate friend, had a claim upon his candour and kindness, yet on reflection I judged that his memory had been weakened by separation as mine had; and then I considered that he was so much engrossed by his wife as to be able to think of little besides, whilst, though he had then been married many months, he had apparently spent with Lady Monson a good deal of his time out of England.

About six weeks before the opening of this story I met him in Bond Street. I was passing him, for time and travel had wonderfully

changed him, and in his long hair and smooth face I must certainly have failed, in the hurry of the pavement, to have recognised the cropped and bewhiskered young fellow, whom I had taken leave of at Gravesend, but for his starting and his peculiar way of peering at me. My rooms were conveniently near; I carried him to them, and a couple of hours passed whilst he told me of his adventures. I noticed that he said much less about his wife than I should have expected to hear from him. He referred to her, indeed; praised her beauty, her accomplishments, with an almost passionate admiration in his way of speaking, yet I remarked a sort of uneasiness in his face too, a kind of shadowing as though the having to speak of his wife raised thoughts which eclipsed or dimmed the brightness of the holiday memories he was full of. Still I was so little sure that when I came to think it over I was convinced it was mere fancy on my part, or at the worst I took it that, though he was worth ten thousand a year, she might be making him uneasy by extravagance, or there might have been a tiff between them before leaving his home to come to London, the memory of which would worry a man of his temperament, a creature of nerves, and tainted besides, as you know. He told me he was in London for a couple of days on a matter of

business, and that he had asked Lady Monson to accompany him, but she had said it vexed her to leave her baby for even a day, and that it was out of the question to subject the bairn to the jolting, risks, and fatigue of a long journey. He looked curiously as he said this, but the expression fled too nimbly from his face to be determinable.

What was I doing? When would it suit me to visit him? If I had no better engagement would I return with him? But, though I had missed nothing of the old cordiality in his greeting and in his conversation that had reference to our bygone jinks and to his travels, his invitation—if invitation it could be called—was lifeless. So much so indeed that it was as good or bad as his telling me he did not want me *then*, however welcome I might be by-and-by. We parted, and I did not see or hear of him again until he came, as I have related, to tell me that his wife had eloped with Colonel Hope-Kennedy.

I had now to decide how to act, and I was never more puzzled or irresolute in the whole course of my life. Had he proposed an ocean cruise as a mere yachting trip, I should have accepted the offer right out of hand.

The sea, as a vocation, I did not love; but very different from the discipline of a man-of-war's quarter-deck, and the fever-breeding tedium of

stagnant and broiling stations, was the business of navigating the blue brine in a large, richly-equipped yacht, of chasing the sun as one chose, of storing one's mind with memories of the glittering pageantry of noble and shining rivers, and green and sparkling scenes of country radiant and aromatic with the vegetation of tropic heights and distant sea-board cities, past the gleam of the coral strand with a scent of sandalwood in the offshore breeze, and boats of strange form and rig, gay as aquatic parrots, sliding along the turquoise surface to the strains of a chant as Asiatic as the smell of the hubble-bubble. No man ever loved travel more than I; only unfortunately, in my time, when I had the right sort of health and spirit for adventure, journeys by land and by sea were tedious and fatiguing. Very few steamers were afloat: one might have sought in vain for a propeller to thrash one to the world's end with the velocity of a gale of wind. I had often a mind, after Wilfrid had started on his voyage to various parts of the world, to follow his example; but I would shake my head when I came to think of the passenger ship, the chance of being locked up for months with a score or two of people, half of whom might prove disagreeable, not to mention indifferent food and a vile ship's cook, with weeks of equatorial deadness, and everything to be gone

through again as one went from place to place by sea, and myself companionless the while.

But a yachting cruise was another matter, and I say I should have accepted Wilfrid's proposal without an instant's reflection, even if I had had to be on board by noon next day, but for the extraordinary *motive* of the trip. It was very plain that he had no clear perception of his own programme. He talked as though everything that happened would correspond with his anticipations. He seemed cocksure, for instance, of overhauling the 'Shark' in mid-ocean, when in reality the possibility of such an encounter was so infinitesimally small that no man in his senses would dream of seriously entering it as an item in his catalogue of chances. Then, supposing him to miss the 'Shark,' he was equally cocksure of arriving at Table Bay before her. The 'Bride' might be the swifter vessel, but the course was six thousand miles and more; the run might occupy two and perhaps three, ay, and even four months, and, though I did not make much of the 'Shark's' five days' start, yet, even if the 'Bride' outsailed her by four feet to one, so much of the unexpected must enter as conditions of so long a run and so great a period of time—calms, headwinds, disaster, strong, favourable breezes for the chased, sneaking and baffling draughts of air for the pursuer—



that it was mere madness to reckon with confidence upon the 'Bride's' arrival at Cape Town before the 'Shark.' So that, as there was no certainty at all about it, what was to follow if my cousin found that the runaways had sailed from Cape Town without leaving the faintest hint behind them as to their destination!

Moreover, how could one be sure that the Colonel and Lady Monson would not change their minds and make for American or Mediterranean ports? Their determination to put the whole world between them and England was not very intelligible, seeing that our globe is a big one, and that scoundrels need not travel far to be lost to the eye. If Lady Monson discovered that she had left behind her the remarkable letter which Wilfrid had given to me to read, then it would be strange if she and the Colonel did not change their programme, unless, indeed, they supposed that Wilfrid would never dream of following them upon the high seas.

But these were idle speculations; they made no part of my business. Should I accompany my cousin on as mad an undertaking as ever passion and distraction could hurry him into? I was heartily grieved for the poor fellow, and I sincerely desired to be of use to him. It might be that after we had been chasing for a few weeks

his heart would sicken to the sight hour after hour of the bare sea-line, and then perhaps, if I were with him, I might come to have influence enough over his moods to divert him from his resolution and so steer us home again; for I would think to myself, grant that we fall in with the 'Shark,' what can Wilfrid do? Would he arm his men and board her? Yachtsmen are a peaceful body of seafarers, and before it could come to a boarding match and a hand-to-hand fight he would have to satisfy his crew that they had signed articles to sell their lives as well as work his ship. To be sure, if the yachts fell within hail and Sir Wilfrid challenged the Colonel, the latter would not, it may be supposed, decline the duel.

But, view the proposal as I might, I could see nothing but a mad scheme in it; and I think it must have been two o'clock in the morning before I had made up my mind, so heartily did I bother myself with considerations; and then, after reflecting that there was nothing to keep me in England, that my cousin had come to me as a brother and asked me in a sense to stand by him as a brother, that the state of his mind imposed it almost as a pious obligation upon me to be by his side in this time of extremity and bitter anguish, that the quest was practically so aimless—the ex-

cursion was almost certain to end on this side the Cape, or, to put it at the worst, to end at Table Bay, which, after all, would prove no formidable cruise, but, on the contrary, a trip that must do me good and kill the autumn months very pleasantly—I say that, after lengthily reflecting on these and many other points and possibilities of the project, I made up my mind that I would sail with him.

Next morning I despatched my man with a note—a brief sentence: ‘*I will be on board to-morrow by four,*’ and received Wilfrid’s reply, written in an agitated sprawling hand: ‘*God bless you! Your decision makes a double-barrelled weapon of my purpose. I have not slept a wink all night—my fifth night of sleeplessness; but I shall feel easier when the clipper keel of the “Bride” is shearing through it in hot and sure pursuit. I start in a quarter of an hour for Southampton. Laura will be overjoyed to hear that you are to be one of us; from the moment of my determining to follow that hell-born rascal she has been exhorting me to choose a companion—of my own sex, I mean, but it would have to be you or nix. My good angel be praised, ’tis all right now! We’ll have ’em, we’ll have ’em! Mark me! Would to heaven the pistol-ball had the power to cause in the heart of a ruffian and a seducer the intolerable mental torments he works for another*



ere it fulfilled its mission by killing him !' He signed himself, '*Yours ever affectionately.*'

Wild as the tone of this note was, it was less suggestive of excitement and passion and restlessness than the writing. I locked it away and possess it still, and no memorial that I can put my hand on has its power of lighting up the past. I never look at it without living again in the veritable atmosphere and colour and emotions of the long-vanished days.

Being a bachelor, my few affairs which needed attention were speedily put in order. My requirements in regard to apparel for a voyage to the Cape I exactly knew, and supplied them in three or four hours. The railroad to Southampton had been opened some months, so I should be spared a long and tiresome journey by coach. By ten o'clock that night I was ready bag and baggage—a creditable performance in a man who for some years had been used to a lounging, inactive life. I offered to take my servant, but he told me he was a bad sailor and afraid of the water, and was without curiosity to view foreign parts; so I paid and discharged him, not doubting that I should be able to manage very well without a man; and leaving what property I could not carry with me in charge of my landlord, I next morning took my departure for Southampton.

I believe I did not in the least degree realise the nature of the queer adventure I had consented to embark on until I found myself in a wherry heading in the direction of a large schooner-yacht that lay a mile away out upon Southampton Water. She was the 'Bride,' the boatman told me, and the handsomest vessel of her kind that he knew.

'A finer craft than the "Shark"? ' said I.

'Whoy yes,' he answered, 'bigger by fourteen or fifteen ton, but Oi dunno about *foiner*. The "Shark" has the sweeter lines, Oi allow; but that there "Bride,"' said he with a toss of his head in the direction of the yacht, sitting with his back upon her as he was, 'has got the ocean-going qualities of a line-of-battle-ship.'

'Take a race between them,' said I, 'which would prove the better ship?'

'Whoy, in loight airs the "Shark," Oi daresay, 'ud creep ahead. In ratching, too, in small winds she'd go to wind'ard of t'other as though she was warping that way. But in anything loike a stiff breeze yonder "Bride" 'ud forereach upon and weather the "Shark" as easy as swallowing a pint o' yale, or my name's Noah, which it ain't.'

'The "Shark" has sailed?'

'Oy, last week.'

'Where bound to, d'ye know?'

‘ Can’t say, Oi’m sure. Oi’ve heerd she was hired by an army gent, and that, wherever his cruise may carry him to, he ain’t going to be in a hurry to finish it.’

‘ Does he sail alone? Or, perhaps, he takes his wife or children with him?’

‘ Well,’ said the waterman, pausing on his oars a minute or so with a grin, whilst his damp oyster-like eyes met in a kind of squint on my face, ‘ the night afore the “ Shark ” sailed Oi fell in with one of her crew, a chap named Bobby Watt; and on my asking him if this here military gent was a-going to make the voyage alone he shuts one oye and says, “ Jim,” he says, Jim being one of my names, not Noah, “ Jim,” says he, “ when soldiers go to sea,” says he, “ do they take pairosols with ’em? and are bonnet boxes to be found ’mongst their luggage? Tell ye what it is, Jim,” he says, “ they may call yachting an innocent divarsion, but bet your life, Jim,” says he, “ ’taint all as moral as it looks!” by which Oi understood,’ said the waterman falling to his oars again, ‘ that the military gent hain’t sailed alone in the “ Shark,” nor took his wife with him neither, if so be he’s a wedded man.’

We were now rapidly approaching the ‘ Bride,’ and as there was little to be learnt from the waterman I ceased to question him, whilst I

inspected the yacht as a fabric that was to make me a home for I knew not how long. Then it was, perhaps, that the full perception of my undertaking and of my cousin's undertaking, too, for the matter of that, broke in upon me with the picture of the fine vessel straining lightly at her cable, whilst past her ran the liquid slope into airy distance, where, in the delicate blue blending of azure radiance floating down and mingling with the dim cerulean light lifting off the face of the quiet waters, you witnessed a faint vision of dashes of pale green and gleaming foreshore with blobs and films of land beyond, swimming, as it seemed, in the autumn haze and distorted by refraction. It was the Isle of Wight, and the shore on either hand went yawning to it till it looked a day's sail away; and I suppose it was the sense of distance that came to me with the scene of the horizon past the yacht, touched with hues illusive enough to look remote, that rendered realisation of Wilfrid's wild programme sharp in me as I directed a critical gaze at the beautiful fabric we were nearing.

And beautiful she was—such a gallant toy as an impassioned sweetheart would love to present to the woman he adored. In those days the memory of the superb Baltimore clippers and of the moulded perfections of the schooners which

traded to the Western Islands and to the Mediterranean for the season's fruits, was still a vital inspiration among the shipwrights and yacht-builders of the country. I had never before seen the 'Bride,' but I had no sooner obtained a fair view of her, first broadside on, then sternwise, as my boatman made for the starboard gangway, than I fell in love with her. She had the beam and scantling of a revenue cutter, with high bulwarks, and an elliptical stern, and a bow with the sheer of a smack, but elegant beyond expression with its dominating flair at the catheads, where it fell sharpening to a knife-like cutwater, thence rounding amidships with just enough swell of the sides to delight a sailor's eye.

The merest landsman must instantly have recognised in her the fabric and body of a sea-going craft of the true pattern. This was delightful to observe. The voyage might prove a long one, with many passages of storm in it, and the prospect of traversing the great oceans of the world; and one would naturally want to make sure in one's floating home of every quality of staunchness and stability. A vessel, however, of over two hundred tons burthen in those times was no mean ship. Crafts of the 'Bride's' dimensions were regularly trading as cargo and passenger boats to foreign parts; so that little in my day



would have been made of any number of voyages round the world in such a structure as Sir Wilfrid's yacht. It is different now. Our ideas have enlarged with the growth of the huge mail boat, and a voyage in a yacht driven by steam and of a burthen considerably in excess of many West Indiamen, which half a century ago were regarded as fine large ships, is considered a performance remarkable enough to justify the publication of a book about it, no matter how destitute of interest and incident the trip may have proved. The fashion of the age favoured gilt, and forward and about her quarters and stern the 'Bride' floated upon the smooth waters all ablaze with the glory of the westering sun striking upon the embellishments of golden devices writhing to the shining form of the semi-nude beauty, that with arms clasped Madonna-wise, sought with an incomparable air of coyness to conceal the graces of her form under the powerful projecting spar of the bowsprit; whilst aft the giltwork, in scrolls, flowers and the like, with a central wreath as a frame for the virgin-white letters of the yacht's name, smote the satin surface under the counter with the sheen of a sunbeam. All this brightness and richness was increased by her sheathing of new copper that rose high upon the glossy bends, and sank with ruddy clearness under the water,

where it flickered like a light there, preserving yet, even in its tremulous waning, something of the fair proportions of the submerged parts.

The bulwarks were so tall that it was not until I was close aboard I could distinguish signs of life on the yacht. I then spied a head over the rail aft watching me, and on a sudden there sprang up alongside of it a white parasol edged with black, and the gleam as it looked of a fair girlish face in the pearly twilight of the white shelter. Then, as I drew close, the man's head uprose and I distinguished the odd physiognomy of my cousin under a large straw hat. He saluted me with a gloomy gesture of the hand, with something, moreover, in his posture to suggest that he was apprehensive of being observed by people aboard adjacent vessels, though I would not swear at this distance of time that there was anything lying nearer to us than half a mile. You would have thought some one of consequence had died on board, all was so quiet. I lifted my hat solemnly in response to Wilfrid's melancholy flourish, as though I was visiting the craft to attend a funeral; the boat then sheered alongside, and paying the waterman his charges, I stepped up the short ladder and jumped on deck.

## CHAPTER III.

## LAURA JENNINGS.

SIR WILFRID was coming to the gangway as I entered, leaving his companion, whom I at once understood to be Miss Laura Jennings, standing near the wheel. He grasped my hand, gazing at me earnestly a moment or two without speaking, and then exclaimed in a low faltering voice, 'You are the dearest fellow to come! you are the dearest fellow to come! Indeed it is good, true and noble of you.'

He then turned to a man dressed in a suit of pilot cloth, with brass buttons on his waistcoat and a round hat of old sailor fashion on his head, who stood at a respectful distance looking on, and motioned to him. He approached.

'Charles, this is Captain Finn, the master of the yacht. My cousin, Mr. Monson.'

Finn lifted his hat with a short scrape of his right leg abaft.

'Glad to see you aboard, sir, glad to see you aboard,' said he, in a leather-lunged note that one



felt he had difficulty in subduing. 'A melancholy errand, Mr. Monson, sir, God deliver us! But we're jockeying a real sweetheart, your honour, and if we ain't soon sticking tight to Captain Fidler's skirts I don't think it'll be for not being able to guess his course.'

He shook his head and sighed. But there lay a jolly expression in his large protruding lobster-like eye that twinkled there like the flame of a taper—enough of it to make me suspect that his mute-like air and Ember-week tone of voice was a mere piece of sympathetic acting, and that he was a merry dog enough when Wilfrid was out of sight.

'See Mr. Monson's luggage aboard, captain,' said my cousin, 'and stowed in his cabin, and then get your anchor. There's nothing to keep us now.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

'Step this way, Charlie, that I may introduce you to my sister-in-law.'

He passed his arm through mine and we walked aft, but I noticed in him a certain manner of cowering, so to speak, as of one who fears that he is being watched and talked about, an involuntary illustration of profound sensitiveness, no doubt, for, as I have said, the yacht lay lonely, and he was hardly likely to dread the scrutiny of his own men.

The girl he introduced me to seemed about nineteen or twenty years old. Lady Monson had been described to me as tall, stately, slow in movement, and of a reposeful expression of face that would have been deemed spiritless in a person wanting the eloquence of her rich and tropic charms: so at least my club friend the young baronet had as good as told me; and it was natural perhaps that I should expect to find her sister something after her style in height and form, if not in colour.

Instead, she was a woman rather under than above the average stature, fair in a sort of golden way, by which I wish to convey a complexion of exquisite softness and purity, very faintly freckled as though a little gold-dust had been artfully shaken over it, a hue of countenance so to speak that blended most admirably with a great quantity of hair of a dark gold, whereof there lay upon her brow many little natural curls and short tresses which her white forehead, shining through them, refined into a kind of amber colour. Her eyes were of violet with a merry spirit in them, which defied the neutralising influence of the sorrowful expression of her mouth. By some she might have been held a thought too stout, but for my part I could see nothing that was not perfectly graceful in the curves and lines of her figure. I

will not pretend to describe how she was dressed; in mourning I thought she was at first when she stood at a distance. She was sombrely clad to keep Wilfrid's melancholy in countenance perhaps, and I daresay she looked the sweeter and fairer for being thus apparelled since there is no wear fitter than dark clothes for setting off such skin and hair as hers. Indeed, her style of dress and the fashion of her coiffure were the anticipation of a taste of a much later date. In those days women brushed their hair into a plaster-like smoothness down the cheeks, then coiled it behind the ear, and stowed what remained in an ungainly lump at the back of the head, into which was stuck a big comb. The dress, again, was loose about the body, as though the least revelation of the figure were an act of immodesty, and the sleeves were what they called *gigots*; all details in short combining to so ugly a result as to set me wondering *now* sometimes that love-making did not come to a dead stand. Miss Laura Jennings' dress was cut to show her figure. The sleeves were tight, and I recollect that she wore gauntlet-shaped gloves that clothed her arm midway to the elbow.

This which I am writing was my impression, at the instant, of the girl with whom I was to be associated for a long while upon the ocean, and with whom I was to share in one adventure at all

events, which I do not doubt you will accept as amongst the most singular that ever befell a voyager. She curtsied with a pretty old world grace, to Wilfrid's introduction, sending at the same time a sparkling glance full of spirited criticism through the fringe of her lids, which drooped with a demureness that was almost coquettish I thought. Then she brightened into a frank manner, whilst she extended her hand.

‘I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Monson; glad indeed to feel sure *now* that you will be of our party. Sir Wilfrid has talked of you much of late. You have acted far more kindly than you can imagine in joining us.’

‘We have a fine vessel under us at all events, Miss Jennings,’ said I, with a look at the unsheltered decks which stretched under the declining sun white as freshly-peeled almonds. ‘She seems to have been born with the right kind of soul, Wilfrid; and I think if your skipper will tell her quietly what is expected of her she will fulfil your utmost expectations.’

He forced a melancholy smile which swiftly faded, and then with a start and a stare over the rail on either hand he exclaimed, ‘It makes me uneasy to be on deck, d’ye know. I feel—though ’tis stupid enough—as if there were eyes *yonder* and *yonder* on the watch. This restlessness will

pass when we get to sea. Let us go below, dinner will be ready by half past five,' pulling out his watch, 'and it is now a little after four.'

He took his sister-in-law's hand in a brotherly, boyish way, and the three of us descended.

The cabin was as shining and sumptuous an interior as ever I was in, or could imagine indeed, of a yacht's internal accommodation. Mirrors, hand-painted bulkheads, combinations of gilt and cream, thick carpets, handsome lamps, silver swinging-trays, and twenty more elegancies which I will not bore you with, made you feel, as you stood at the foot of the companion steps, as though you had entered some delicious, sparkling, fragrant little drawing-room. The bedrooms were at each extremity. The berth allotted to me was a roomy airy apartment forward, with a stout bulkhead at the end of the short passage that effectually closed this part of the craft from whatever might be amidships and beyond. There was a stand of arms fixed here, and my thoughts instantly went to Colonel Hope-Kennedy and Lady Monson, and the crew of the 'Shark,' as I counted twenty fowling pieces with long polished barrels and bright stocks, with hooks alongside from which hung a number of cutlasses and pistols of the sort you then found in the small-arms chests aboard men of war. The pattern of these weapons persuaded me that they



had been collected in a hurry, purchased out of hand off some Southampton or Gosport dealer in such ware. They can signify but one sort of business, thought I; but bless my heart! does he *seriously* entertain notions of boarding if we fall in with the craft? And do his men suspect his intentions? And has he provided for all things by shipping a fighting crew?

I peered into my berth, saw that it would make me as comfortable a sea bedroom as it was possible to desire, and returned to the cabin, where Wilfrid and Miss Jennings were sitting, he at a small table right aft, sprawling upon it with his elbow, his chin in his hand, his face gloomy with melancholy and anger, and his eyes fixed upon a porthole through which he might just get a glimpse of green shore with a tremble of water yellow under the western light steeping to it; she near him on a short sofa, with her back against the vessel's side, toying with her hat which lay in her lap, so that I was now able to see that she was indeed a very sweet woman to the topmost curl of gold that gleamed upon her head. Indeed, you seemed to witness her charms as in a light of her own making. There was something positively phosphoric in the irradiation on her face and hair, as though in sober truth they were self-luminous. A couple of fellows were bringing my luggage

down the hatch, but very quietly. I knew they were getting the anchor on deck by the dim *chink chink* of the windlass pawls, but I could hear no other sounds, no singing out of orders, nothing save the pulsing of the windlass barrel to indicate that we were about to start. There was an element of solemnity in this our first step, at all events, along the prodigious liquid highway we were about to enter that was not a little irksome to me. After all it was not *my* wife who had run away, and whom I was starting in pursuit of, and, though I keenly sympathised with my cousin, it was impossible that I could feel or look as though I was broken down by grief.

‘We are not a numerous party,’ said I, in a hearty way, seating myself, ‘one less, indeed, than we bargained for, Wilfrid, for I am without a servant. My fellow funkcd the very name of salt water, and there was no time to replace him.’

‘There are two stewards to wait upon you, and my own valet besides,’ said Wilfrid, bringing his eyes with an effort from the porthole, through which he was staring, to my face. ‘Trust me to see that you are made perfectly comfortable.’

‘My dear fellow—*comfortable*! Why, this is palatial!’ I cried, with a comprehensive sweep of my hand round the cabin; ‘much too luxurious, in my humble opinion; don’t you think so, Miss

Jennings? Only figure all these fine things going down to swell the navies that lie green on the Atlantic ooze.'

'The "Bride" is a lovely boat,' she answered, 'and very swift, Wilfrid says.'

'Swift enough to serve my turn, I expect,' said he, with what the Scotch call a *raised* look coming into his face.

'But why not come on deck?' said I; 'no fear of being noticed, Wilfrid. Who is there to see us, and who is there to care if anybody *should* see us?'

He drew his tall, awkward figure together with a shake of the head.

'Get you on deck by all means, Charles, and take Laura with you if she will go. I have occupation to last me until the dinner-bell in my cabin.'

'Will you accompany me, Miss Jennings?' said I.

'Indeed I will,' she exclaimed with an alacrity that exhibited her as little disposed as myself to rest passive in the shadow of my cousin's heavy, resentful melancholy.

He seized my hand in both his as I rose to escort the girl on deck. 'God bless you once again, my dear boy, for joining us. Presently I shall feel the stronger and perhaps the brighter



for having you by my side.' He looked wistfully, still holding my hand, at Miss Jennings, as though he would address a word to her too, but on a sudden broke away with a sigh like a sob, and walked hastily to the after passage, where his cabin was.

In silence, and much affected, I handed the girl up the companion steps. Gay and glittering as was the cabin, its inspirations were but as those of a charnel-house compared with the sense of life and the quickness of spirit you got by mounting on deck and entering the shining atmosphere of the autumn afternoon with the high blue sky filled with the soft and reddening light of the waning luminary, whilst already the land on either side was gathering to its green and gold and brown the tender dyes of the evening. The distance had been clarified by a small easterly air that had sprung up since I first stepped on board, and the Isle of Wight hung in a soft pure mass of many dyes upon the white gleam of the water that brimmed to it. There was a large frigate, as I imagined her, drawing slowly up past Gosport way, heading westwards, and the eye fastened upon her with a sort of wonder; for, though she looked to be hull down and the merest toy, and indistinguishable by the careless glance as a sail, yet she was too defined to pass for a cloud either,

whilst the silver brightness seemed impossible in canvas, and you watched her with a fancy in you of a large bland star that would be presently afloat in the blue, and sparkling there on the brow of the rising night. There were a few vessels of different kinds anchored off Southampton, and the scene in that direction looked wonderfully fair and peaceful, with the spars of the craft gilt with sunshine and a flash in their hulls where paint or glass caught the declining beam, and past them the higher reaches of the light blue water with the twinkling of little sails that carried the gaze shorewards to the town.

All this my sight took in quickly. The men had quitted the windlass, and were making sail upon the yacht nimbly, but so quietly, even with a quality of stealth in their manner of pulling and hauling, that we could not have been a stiller ship had we been a privateersman getting under way on a dark night with a design of surprising a rich fabric or of escaping a heavily-armed enemy. They looked a stout crew of men, attired without the uniformity that is usual in yachting companies in these days, though the diversity of dress was not sufficiently marked to offend. I gathered that the vessel carried a mate as well as a captain, and detected him in the figure of a

sturdy little fellow, with a cast in his eye and a mat of red hair under his chin, who stood betwixt the knightheads forward, staring aloft at a hand on the topsail yard. Captain Finn saluted the girl and me with a flourish of a hairy paw to his hat, but was too full of business to give us further heed.

‘We shall be under way very soon now, Miss Jennings,’ said I; ‘it is a strange voyage that we are undertaking.’

‘A sad one too,’ she answered.

‘You show a deal of courage in accompanying Wilfrid,’ I exclaimed.

‘I hesitated at first,’ said she, ‘but he seemed so sure of overtaking the “Shark,” and pressed me so earnestly to join him, believing that the sight of me, or that by my pleading to—to——’ She faltered, flushing to the eyes, and half turned from me with such a tremulous parting of her lips to the gush of the mild breeze, which set a hundred golden fibres of her hair dancing about her ears, that I expected to see a tear upon her cheek when she looked at me afresh. I pretended to be interested in nothing but the movements of the men who were hoisting the main-sail.

‘What do *you* think of the voyage, Mr. Monson?’ she exclaimed after a little pause

though she held her face averted as if waiting for the flush to fade out of her cheeks.

‘It bothers me considerably,’ I answered; ‘there is nothing to make heads or tails of in it that I can see.’

‘But why?’ and now she stole a sidelong look at me.

‘Well, first of all,’ I exclaimed, ‘I cannot imagine that there is the faintest probability of our picking up the “Shark.” She may be below the horizon, and we may be sailing three or four leagues apart for days at a stretch, and neither ship with the faintest suspicion of the other being close. The ocean is too big for a hunt of this sort.’

‘But suppose we *should* pick her up, to use your term, Mr. Monson?’

‘Suppose it, Miss Jennings, and add this supposition: that the gallant Colonel’—she frowned at his name, with a sweet curl of horror on her lip as she looked down—‘who will long before have twigged us, declines to heave-to or have anything whatever to do with us; what then?’

‘I suggested this to your cousin,’ she answered quickly; ‘it is a most natural objection to make. He answered that if the “Shark” refused to stop when he *hailed* her—that is the proper term, I know—he would compel her to come to a stand

by continuing to fire at her, even if it came to his sinking her, though his object would be to knock her mast down to prevent her from sailing.'

I checked a smile at the expression 'knock her mast down,' and then caught myself running my glance round in search of any hint of ordnance of a persuasive kind; and now it was that I noticed for the first time, secured amidships of the forecastle, and comfortably housed and tarpaulined, something that my naval instincts were bound to promptly interpret into a *Long Tom*, and of formidable calibre too, if the right sort of hint of it was to be obtained out of its swathing. I also observed another feature that had escaped me: I mean a bow-port on either side the bowsprit—a detail of equipment so uncommon in a pleasure craft as to force me to the conclusion that the apertures had been quite newly cut and fitted.

I uttered a low whistle, whilst I found my companion's gaze rooted upon me with the same critical attention in the spirited blue gleam of it I had before noticed.

'Well!' said I, taking a bit of a breath, 'upon my word, though, I should not have thought he had it in him! Yes, yonder's a remedy,' I continued, nodding in the direction of the forecastle,

‘to correspond with Wilfrid’s intentions if he’s fortunate enough to fall in with the “Shark.” Will *she* be armed, I wonder? It would then make the oldest of all peppering matches.’

‘If the yacht escapes us, we are certain to meet with her at the Cape,’ said Miss Jennings.

It was idle to argue on matters of seamanship with the pretty creature.

‘Wilfrid has said little on the subject to me,’ I remarked. ‘He was dreadfully overcome when he called to ask me to accompany him. But it is good and brave of you to enter upon this wild experiment with a womanly and a sisterly hope of courting the fugitive back to her right and only resting-place. My cousin will receive her, then?’

‘He means to come between her and the consequences of her—of her folly,’ said she, colouring again with a flash in her eye and a steady confrontment of me, ‘let the course he may afterwards make up his mind to pursue be what it will.’

I saw both distress and a little hint of temper in her face, and changed the subject.

‘Have you been long in England?’

‘I arrived three months ago at Sherburne Abbey’ (my cousin’s seat in the north). ‘You know I am an Australian?’



‘Yes, but not through Wilfrid, of whose marriage I should have learned nothing but for hearing it talked about one day in a club. A young baronet who had met Lady Monson was loud in her praises. He described her as a wonderfully beautiful woman, but dark, with fiery Spanish eyes and raven tresses;’ and here I peeped at her own soft violet stars and sunny hair.

‘Yes, she is beautiful, Mr. Monson,’ she answered sadly, ‘too beautiful indeed. Her face has proved a fatal gift to her. What madness!’ she exclaimed, whispering her words almost. ‘And never was there a more devoted husband than Wilfrid. And her baby—the little lamb! Oh, how could she do it! how could she do it!’

‘With whom has the child been placed?’ said I.

‘With a cousin, Mrs. Trevor.’

‘Oh, I know, a dear good creature: the bairn will be in excellent hands.’

‘Sir Wilfrid was too affectionate, Mr. Monson. You know,’ she continued, looking at me sideways, her face very grave, ‘if you have ceased to love or to like a person, your aversion will grow in proportion as he grows fond of you. It is *not* true, Mr. Monson, that love begets love. No; if it were true, my sister would be the happiest of women.’

‘Have you met Colonel Hope-Kennedy?’

‘Oh yes, often and often. He was a very constant visitor at Sherburne Abbey.’

‘Pretty good-looking?’

‘Tall, very gentlemanly, not by any means handsome to my taste, but I have no doubt many women would think him so.’

‘The name is familiar to me, but I never met the man. Did he live in the north?’

‘No; whenever he came to Sherburne Abbey he was your cousin’s guest.’

Phew! thought I. ‘And, of course,’ I said, willing to pursue the subject afresh, since it did not seem now to embarrass her to refer to it, whilst I was curious to learn as much of the story as could be got, ‘my cousin had no suspicion of the scoundrelism of the man he was entertaining.’

‘No, nor is he to be blamed. He is a gentleman, Mr. Monson, and, like all fine, generous, amiable natures, very, very slow to distrust persons whom he has honoured with his friendship. When he came to me with the news that Henrietta had left him I believed he had gone *utterly* mad, knowing him to be just a *little*’—she hesitated, and ran her eyes over my face as though positively she halted merely to the notion that perhaps *I* was a trifle gone too; and then, clasping her hands before her, and hanging her head so



as to look as if she was speaking with her eyes closed, she went on: 'I was much with Henrietta, and often when Colonel Hope-Kennedy was present. I had ridden with them, had watched them whilst they played billiards—a game my sister was very fond of—observed them at the piano when she was singing and he turning the music, or when she accompanied him in a song; he sang well. But—it might be, it is true, because I was as unsuspicious as Wilfrid—yet I declare, Mr. Monson, that I never witnessed even so much as a look exchanged between them of a kind to excite a moment's uneasiness. No! Wilfrid cannot be charged with blindness; the acting was as exquisite as the object was detestable.' And she flushed up again, half turning from me with a stride towards the rail and a wandering look at the green country, which I accepted as a hint that she wished the subject to drop.

The yacht was now under way. They had catted, and were fishing the anchor forwards; I noticed that the man I had taken to be the mate had arrived aft and was at the wheel. The vessel's head was pointing fair for the Solent, and already you heard a faint crackling sound like a delicate rending of satin rising from under the bows, though there was so little weight in the

draught of air that the 'Bride' floated without the least perceptible list or inclination, spite of all plain sail being upon her with the exception of the top-gallant sail.

'Fairly started at last, Miss Jennings,' said I.

She glanced round hastily as though disturbed in an absorbing reverie, smiled, and then looked sad enough to weep, all in a breath.

Well, it was a solemn moment for her, I must say. She had her maid with her, it is true; but she was the only lady on board. There was none of her own quality with whom she could talk apart--no other woman to keep her in countenance, so to speak, with the sympathy of presence and sex; she was bound on a trip of which no mortal man could have dated the termination--an adventure that might carry her all about the world for aught she knew, for, since she was fully conscious of the very variable weather of my cousin's mind, to use the old phrase, she would needs be too shrewd not to conjecture that many wild and surprising things were quite likely to happen whilst the power of directing the movements of the yacht remained his.

And then again she was in quest of her sister, without a higher hope to support her than a fancy--that was the merest dream to my mind,

when I thought of the little baby the woman had left behind her, to say nothing of her husband—that her passionate entreaties backing Wilfrid's appeals might coax her ladyship to quit the side of the gallant figure she had run away with.

Just then the merry silver tinkling of a bell smartly rung sounded through the open skylight, and at the same moment the form of a neat and comely young woman arose in the companion hatch.

‘What is it, Graham?’ inquired Miss Jennings.

‘The first dinner-bell, Miss. The second will ring at the half-hour.’

The girl pulled out a watch of the size of a thumbnail and exclaimed, ‘It is already five o'clock, Mr. Monson. It cannot be a whole hour since you arrived! I hope the time will pass as quickly when we are at sea.’

She lingered a moment gazing shorewards, sheltering her eyes sailor-fashion with an ungloved hand of milk-white softness, on which sparkled a gem or two; then, giving me a slight bow, she went to the companion and stepped down the ladder with the grace and ease of a creature floating on wings. Ho, ho! thought I, she will have her sea legs anyhow; no need therefore, Master Charles, to be *too* officious with

your hand and arm when the hour of tumblefication comes. But that she was likely to prove a good sailor was a reasonable conjecture, seeing that she was comparatively fresh from probably a four months' passage from Melbourne.

I followed her after a short interval, and then to the summons of the second dinner-bell entered the cabin. The equipment of the table rendered festal the sumptuous furniture of this interior with the sparkle of silver and crystal, and the dyes of wines blending with the central show of rich flowers. The western sunshine lay upon the skylight, and the atmosphere was ruddy with it. One is apt to be curious when in novel situations, and I must confess that yachting in such a craft as this was something very new to me, not to speak of the uncommon character one's experiences at the onset would take from the motive and conditions of the voyage ; and this will prove my apology for saying that, whilst I stood waiting for Wilfrid and his sister-in-law to arrive, I bestowed more attention, furtive as it might be, upon the two stewards and my cousin's man than I should have thought of obliging them with ashore. The stewards were commonplace enough, a pair of trim-built fellows, the head one's face hard with that habitual air of solicitude which comes at sea to a man whose duties lie amongst

crockery and bills of fare, and whose leisure is often devoted to dark and mysterious altercations with the cook ; the second steward was noticeable for nothing but a large strawberry mark on his left cheek ; but Wilfrid's man was worth a stare. I had no recollection of him, and consequently he must have been taken into my cousin's service since I was last at the Abbey, as we used to call it. He had the appearance of a man who had been bred to the business of a mute, a lantern-jawed, yellow, hollow-eyed person whose age might have been five-and-twenty or five-and-forty ; hair as black as coal, glossy as grease brushed flat to the tenacity of sticking-plaster, and fitting his egg-shaped skull like a wig. He was dressed in black, his trousers a little short and somewhat tight at the ankles, where they revealed a pair of white socks bulging with a hint of gout over the sides of a pair of pumps. He stood behind the chair that Wilfrid would take with his hands reverentially clasped upon his waistcoat, his whole posture indicative of humility and resignation. Nothing could be more in harmony with the melancholy nature of our expedition than this fellow's countenance.

Miss Jennings arrived and took her place ; she was followed by my cousin, who walked to the table with the gait of a person following a

coffin. This sort of thing, thought I, must be suffered for a day or two, but afterwards, if the air is not to be cleared by a rousing laugh, it won't be for lack of any effort on my part to tune up my pipes.



## CHAPTER IV.

## IN THE SOLENT.

THE dinner was exquisitely cooked, and as perfectly ordered a repast as the most fastidious could devise or desire; but very little was said, mainly, I suspect, because our thoughts were filled with the one subject we could not refer to whilst the attendants hung about us. What fell was the merest commonplace, but I noticed that whilst Wilfrid ate little he offered no objection to the frequent replenishing of his glass with champagne by the melancholy chap who stood behind him.

By-and-by we found ourselves alone.

‘That is very honest port; you need not be afraid of it, Charles,’ said my cousin. ‘Do you understand gunnery?’

‘I believe I could load a piece and point it,’ said I, smiling, ‘but beyond *that*——’

‘Have you seen the gun on the forecastle?’

‘Just the outline of a cannon,’ I answered,



‘under a smother of tarpaulin. What is called a Long Tom, I think.’

‘You will have guessed the object of my mounting it?’ said he, with a frown darkening his face to one of those angry moods which would sweep athwart his mind like the deep but flitting shadows of squall clouds over a gloomy sky sullen with the complexion of storm.

‘Yes; Miss Jennings explained,’ I answered, glancing at her and meeting her eye, in which I seemed to find the faintest hint of rebuke, as though she feared I might be laughing in my sleeve. ‘What’s the calibre, Wilfrid?’

‘Eighteen pounds,’ he answered.

‘An eighteen pounder, eh! That should bring the “Shark’s” spars about their ears, though. Let me think: the range of an eighteen pounder will be, at an elevation of five degrees, a little over a mile.’

‘If,’ cried my cousin—lifting his hand as though to smite the table, then bringing his clenched fist softly down, manifestly checked in some hot impetuous impulse by the sense of the presence of the girl, who regarded him with a face as serious as though she were listening to a favourite preacher—‘if,’ he repeated, sobering his voice with the drooping of his arm, ‘we succeed in overhauling the “Shark,” and they refuse to

heave her to, my purpose is to wreck her aloft, and *then*, should they show fight, to continue firing at her until I sink her.'

There was a vicious expression in his eyes as he said this, to which the peculiar indescribable trembling or quivering of the lids imparted a singular air of cunning.

'Is the "Shark" armed, do you know?' said I.

'She carries a couple of small brass pieces, I believe, for purposes of signalling. Pop-guns,' said he, contemptuously. 'But I fancy she has an armoury of her own. Lord Winterton was constantly cruising north on shooting excursions, and it is quite likely that he let the weapons which belong to him with the yacht.'

'If Colonel Hope-Kennedy's programme,' said I, 'includes a ramble amongst the South Sea Islands, you may reckon upon his having equipped himself with small arms and powder enough, if only with an eye to man-eating rogues. But to revert to your Long Tom, Wilfrid. It should not be hard to sink a yacht with such a piece; but you are not for *murdering* your wife, my dear fellow?'

'No, no,' said he slowly, and speaking to me, though he kept his eyes fixed upon his sister-in-law, 'have no fear of that. It is I that am the murdered man.' He pressed his hand to his

heart. 'Rather put it thus: that when they find their vessel hulled and sinking they will get their boats over and be very willing to be picked up by us.'

'But your round shot may knock their boats into staves,' said I, 'and what then?'

'Our own boats will be at hand to rescue them,' said he, now looking at me full with an expression of relish of the argument.

'But, my dear Wilfrid,' said I, 'don't you know that when a craft founders she has a trick of drowning most of the people aboard her, and amongst the few survivors, d'ye see, who contrived to support themselves by whatever lay floating might *not be* Lady Monson!'

He took a deep breath, and said, so slowly that he seemed to articulate with difficulty, 'Be it so. I have made up my mind. If we overhaul the "Shark" and she declines to heave to, I shall fire into her. The blood of whatever follows will be upon *their* heads. This has been forced upon me; it is none of my seeking. I do not mean that Colonel Hope-Kennedy shall possess my wife, and I will take her from him alive if possible; but rest assured I am not to be hindered from separating them though her death should be the consequence.'

Miss Jennings clasped her fingers upon her

forehead and sat motionless, looking down. For a little I was both startled and bewildered; one moment he talked as though his wish was that his wife should not be harmed, and the next, in some concealed convulsion of wrath, he betrayed a far blacker resolution than ever I could have imagined him capable of. Yet in the brief silence that followed I had time to rid myself of my little fit of consternation by considering, first of all, that he was now talking just as, according to my notion, he was acting—insanely; next, that it was a thousand to one against our falling in with the yacht; and again, supposing we came up with her, it was not very probable that the crew of the ‘Bride’ could be tempted, even by heavy bribes, into a measure that might put them in jeopardy of their necks or their liberty.

It was now dark, and the cabin lamps had been for some time lighted. The evening looked black against the portholes and the skylight, but the cheerfulness and beauty of the cabin were greatly heightened by the sparkling of the oil-flames in the mirrors, the swing-trays, the glass-like surface of the bulkheads, and so on. Miss Laura’s golden loveliness—do not laugh at my poor nautical attempts to put this amber-coloured, violet-eyed woman before you—showed, as one may well suppose of such a complexion and tints, incom-

parably perfect, I thought, in the soft though rich radiance diffused by the burning sperm. I wondered that she should listen so passively to Wilfrid's confession of his intentions should we overhaul the 'Shark.' My gaze went to her as he concluded that little speech I have just set down ; but I witnessed no alteration in as much of her face as was visible, nor any stir, as of one startled or shocked, in her posture. Possibly she did not master all the significance of his words ; for how should a girl realise the full meaning of plumping round shot out of an eighteen-pounder into a vessel till she was made a sieve of ? Or it might be that she was of my mind in regarding the expedition as a lunatic undertaking, and in suspecting that a few weeks of this ocean hunt would sicken Wilfrid of his determination to chase the 'Shark' round the world. Or mingled with these fancies, besides, there might be enough of violent resentment against her sister, of grief, pain, shame, to enable her to listen with an unmoved countenance to fiercer and wilder menaces than Wilfrid had as yet delivered himself of.

These thoughts occupied my mind during the short spell of silence that followed my cousin's speech. He suddenly rang a little handbell, and his melancholy servant came sliding up to him out of the after cabin.

‘Tell Captain Finn I wish to see him—that is, if he can leave the deck.’

The fellow mounted the steps.

‘What is the name of that gloomy-looking man of yours, Wilfrid?’

‘Muffin,’ he answered.

‘Have I not seen somebody wonderfully like him,’ said I, ‘holding on with drunken gravity to the top of a hearse trotting home from the last public-house along the road from the graveyard?’

Miss Laura laughed; and there was a girlish freshness and arch cordiality in her laughter that must have put me into a good humour, I think, had it been *my* wife instead of Wilfrid’s that Colonel Hope-Kennedy was sailing away with.

‘Maybe, Charles, maybe,’ he answered, with a dull smile; ‘he *may* have been an undertaker’s man for all I know; though I doubt it, because I had him from Lord —— with a five years’ character, every word of which has proved true. But I knew you would have your joke. The fellow fits my temper to a hair; he has a hearse-like face I admit; but then he is the quietest man in the world—a very ghost; summon him, and if he shaped himself out of thin air he couldn’t appear at your elbow more noiselessly. That’s his main recommendation to me. Any kind of noise now I find distracting; even music—Laura will tell



you that I'll run a mile to escape the sound of a piano.'

At this moment a pair of pilot breeches showed themselves in the companion-way, and down came Captain Finn. As he stood, hat in hand, soberly clothed with nothing more jimcrack in the way of finery upon him than a row of brass waistcoat-buttons, I thought he looked a very proper, sailorly sort of man. There was no lack of intelligence in his eyes, which protruded, as from a long habit of staring too eagerly to windward and trying to see into the inside of gales of wind. He was remarkable, however, for a face that was out of all proportion too long, not for the width of his head only, but for his body; whilst his legs, on the other hand, were as much too short, so that he submitted himself as a person whose capacity of growth had been experimentally distributed, insomuch that his legs appeared to have come to a full stop when he was still a youth, whilst in his face the active principle of elongation had continued laborious until long after the term when nature should have made an end.

'A glass of wine, captain?' said Sir Wilfrid.

'Thank your honour. Need makes the old wife trot, they say, and I feel a-dry—I feel a-dry.'

'Put your hat down and sit, Finn. I want you to give my cousin, Mr. Monson, your views



respecting this—this voyage. But first, where are we?’

‘Why,’ answered the captain, balancing the wine-glass awkwardly betwixt a thumb and a forefinger that resembled nothing so much as a brace of stumpy carrots, whilst he directed a nervous look from Wilfrid to me and on to Miss Laura, as though he would have us observe that he addressed us generally; ‘there’s Yarmouth lights opening down over the port bow, and I reckon to be clear of the Solent by about three bells—half-past nine o’clock.’

‘The navigation hereabouts,’ said I, ‘needs a bright look-out. The captain may not thank us for calling him below.’

‘Lord love ’ee, Mr. Monson, sir,’ he answered, ‘the mate, Jacob Crimp, him with the one eye slewed—if so be as you’ve noticed the man, sir—he’s at the helm, and I’d trust him for any inshore navigation, from the Good’ens to the Start, blind-folded. Why, he knows his soundings by the smell of the mud.’

‘How is the weather?’ inquired my cousin.

‘Fine, clear night, sir; the stars plentiful and the moon arising; the wind’s drawed a bit norradly, and’s briskening at that; yet it keeps a draught, with nothing noticeable in the shape of weight in it. Well, your honour, and you, Mr. Monson, sir,

and you, my lady, all I'm sure I can say, is, here's luck,' and down went the wine.

'Captain,' said Sir Wilfrid, 'oblige me by giving Mr. Monson your views of the chase we have started upon.'

Finn put down the wine-glass and dried his lips on a pocket handkerchief of the size of a small ensign.

'Well,' he began with a nervous uneasy twisting about of his legs and feet, 'my view's this: Fidler isn't likely to take any other road to the Cape than the one that's followed by the Indiemmen. Now,' said he laying a forefinger in the palm of his big hand, yellow still with ancient stains of tar, whilst Wilfrid watched him in his near-sighted way, leaning forward in the posture of one absorbed by what is said; 'you may take that there road as skirting the Bay o' Biscay and striking the latitude of forty at about fifteen degrees east; then a south by west half west course for the Canaries; the Equator to be cut at twenty-five degrees west, and a straight course for Trinidad to follow with a clean brace up to the South East trades. What d'ye think, sir?'

'Oh, 'tis about the road, no doubt,' said I, for whatever might have been my thoughts, I had no intention to drop a discouraging syllable then before Finn in my cousin's hearing.

‘But,’ said the captain, eyeing me nervously and anxiously, ‘if so be as we should have the luck to fall into that there “Shark’s” wake, you know, we shan’t need to trouble ourselves with the course to the Cape south of the equator.’

‘Of course not,’ exclaimed Sir Wilfrid.

‘By which I mean to say,’ continued the captain, giving his back hair a pull as though it were some bell rope with which he desired to ring up the invention or imagination that lay drowsy in his brain, ‘that if we aren’t on to the “Shark” this side the Line it’ll be better for us to tarn to and make up our mind to crack on all for Table Bay to be there afore her, without further troubling ourselves about her heaving in sight, though, of course, the same bright look-out ’ll be kept.’

‘Good,’ said Wilfrid with a heavy emphatic nod; ‘that’s not to be bettered, I think, Charles.’

‘I suppose,’ said I, addressing Finn, ‘that, though your hope will be to pick up the “Shark” any day after a given period, and though you’ll follow the scent of her as closely as your conjecture of Fidler’s navigation will admit, you will still go on sweating—pray pardon this word in its sea sense, Miss Jennings—your craft as though the one business of the expedition was to make the swiftest possible passage to the Cape of Good Hope?’

‘Ay, never sparing a cloth, sir, and she’s something to jockey, Mr. Monson. You don’t know her yet, sir.’

‘The “Shark’s” a fore and aft schooner?’

‘Yes,’ he answered.

‘She carries a square sail, no doubt?’

‘Ay, a big ’un, but good only for running, and we ain’t without that canvas, too, you must know,’ he added with the twinkle of humour in his gaze that I had observed in him when Wilfrid had first made him known to me. ‘Enough of it, Mr. Monson, to hold wind to serve a Dutchman for a week, not to mention a torps’l and a t’gallants’l fit for a line-o’-battle ship to ratch under.’

This was vague talk, but it pleased Wilfrid.

‘Square yards are very well,’ said I; ‘but surely they don’t allow a vessel to look up to it as though her canvas was fore and aft only? I merely ask for information. My marine experiences were limited to square rigs.’

‘There’s nothen to prevent the “Bride” from looking up to it as close as the “Shark,”’ answered Finn. ‘The yards ’ll lie fore and aft; what’s to hinder them? There ain’t no spread, sir, like what you get in ships with your futtock rigging and backstays and shrouds in the road of the slings elbowing their way to channels big enough

for a ball-room. Besides,' he added, 'suppose it *should* be a matter of a quarter of a pint's difference, we need but stow the square cloths, and then we ain't no worse off than the "Shark."'

'True,' said I, thinking more of Miss Jennings than of what Finn was saying: so perfect a picture of girlish beauty did she happen to be at that instant as she leaned on her elbow, supporting her chin with a small white hand, her form in a posture that left one side of her face in shadow, whilst the other side lay bright, golden, and soft in the lamplight over the table. She was listening with charming gravity, and a countenance of sympathy whose tenderness was unimpaired by an appearance of attention that I could not doubt was just a little forced, since our sailor talk could not but be Greek to her. Besides, at intervals, there was a lift of the white lid, a gleam of the violet eye, which was like assuring one that thought was kept in the direction of our conversation only by constraint.

I was beginning to feel the want of a cigar, and I had been sitting long enough now to make me pine for a few turns on deck, but I durst not be abrupt in the face of my cousin's devouring stare at his skipper and the pathetic spectacle of the contending passions in him as he hearkened, now nodding, now gloomily smiling, now lying

back on a sudden with a frown which he made as if to smooth out by pressing his hand to his brow.

‘The “Shark,”’ said I, ‘has five days’ start of us. Give her a hundred miles a day, for the mere sake of argument; she should be, at that, well in the heart of the Bay.’

‘By heaven! within arm’s length of us, when you put it so!’ cried Wilfrid, extending his hand in a wild, darting, irrelevant gesture, and closing his fingers with a snap as though upon some phantom throat he had seen and thought to clutch.

‘Five hundred miles,’ exclaimed Finn, apparently giving no heed to the baronet’s action. ‘Well, sir, as a bit of supposing, there’s no harm in it. It might be more. *I* should allow less. There’s been no weight of wind down Channel. What’s happened then to blow her along? But there’s no telling. Anyhow,’ said he, picking up his cap and rising, ‘there’s nothing in five hundred miles, no, nor in a thousand, to make us anxious with such a race-course as lies afore us. ’Tain’t as if we’d got to catch the craft before she’d made Madeira.’ He paused, looking a little irresolute, and then said, addressing Wilfrid, ‘I don’t know if there’s anything more your honour would like to ask of me?’

‘No, not for the moment,’ answered my cousin dully, with the air of a man languid with a sudden



sense of weariness or exhaustion following some internal fiery perturbation ; ‘ it is just this, Finn. Mr. Monson served in the Royal Navy for a few years, and I was anxious that he should be at once made acquainted with your views so that he and you could combine your experiences. You have chased in your time, Charles, no doubt ! ’

‘ Not very often, and then always something that was in sight,’ I answered with a slight glance at Finn, whose gaze instantly fell whilst he exclaimed :

‘ Well, sir, any suggestion you can make I’ll be mighty thankful to receive. But it’ll be all plain sailing, I don’t doubt ; it’ll be all plain sailing,’ he repeated, rumbling out the words in a stifled hurricane note, and, giving us a bow, he went up the steps.

Wilfrid gazed at me vacantly when I proposed a cigar on deck.

‘ What do you think of Finn ? ’ he asked.

‘ He seems as honest a man and as practical a seaman as needs be. But he has had command of this yacht since you bought her ? ’

He nodded. ‘ Well then, of course, you know all about him. He has clearly been a merchant Jack in his day, and has all necessary experience, I daresay, to qualify him for this charge. But I say, Wilfrid, let us go on deck, my dear fellow



Miss Jennings, I am sure, will not object to the scent of a cigar in the open air.'

'Nor down here either,' she exclaimed.

'I shall remember that,' said I gratefully. 'Now, Wilfrid, won't you——?'

'No,' he interrupted; 'I am drowsy, and thank Heaven for a sensation that threatens to become a novelty. If I get no rest to-night it will be my eighth of sleeplessness, and I must humour myself; yes, I must humour myself,' he repeated, talking in a sort of muttering way, and rising.

I advised him by all means to withdraw if he really felt tired, and further recommended a boatswain's caulker of whisky to top off the champagne and port he had been swallowing.

'How will you amuse yourself, Laura?' he exclaimed, turning to her. 'It will be dull work for you, I fear.'

'No, no,' cried I blithely, 'why need Miss Jennings be dull? It must be our business to keep her lively.'

'I can sit and read here,' said she, 'till it is time to go to bed. What is the hour, Mr. Monson?'

'Just on the stroke of eight,' said I.

She made a pretty little grimace, and then burst into one of her refreshing cordial laughs.

‘A little early for bed, Wilfrid,’ she exclaimed.

He smothered a yawn and responded: ‘I will leave you to Charles. Would to heaven I had his spirits. God bless you both—good night.’

He rang for his valet and stalked with hanging arms and drooping head, in the most melancholic manner picturable, to his cabin. I asked Miss Jennings to accompany me on deck.

‘There is a moon in the air,’ said I; ‘you may see the haze of it through this porthole; but I must not forget that it is an autumn night, so let me beg you to wrap yourself up warmly whilst I slip on a pea-coat.’

I fancied she hung in the wind an instant, as a girl might who could not promptly see her way to walking the deck of a yacht alone with a young man on a moonlight or any other night, but she assented so quickly in reality that I daresay my suspicion was an idle and groundless bit of sensitiveness. Five minutes later we were on deck together.

The yacht was floating through the dusk—that was tintured into glimmering pearl by the broad face of silver moon which had already climbed several degrees above the black sky-line of the Isle of Wight—without the least perceptible stir or tremor in her frame.

The wind was well abaft the starboard beam ; the great main boom overhung the port quarter ; the white sail rose wan to the moonshine with a large gaff topsail above it—for those were the days of gaffs—dimming into a space of airy faintness to the masthead, above the white button of whose truck you caught the icy gleam of a metal vane as though it was a piece of meteoric scoring under the dust of the stars that hovered in the velvet gloom like a sheet of undulating silver glooming out into hollows in places. Light as the breeze was, and following us besides, it held the canvas asleep ; but that every cloud-like cloth was doing its work, too, the ear quickly noted in the pleasant fountain-like sounds of running waters over the side, with a cool seething noise in the wake and a fairy tinkling of exploding foam-bells. The land to port loomed black against the moonshine, save where some slope or other catching the slanting beam showed the faint green of its herbage or wooded growths in a very phantasm of hue, like some verdant stretch of land dyeing an attenuated veil of vapour witnessed afar upon the ocean. Over the port bow I caught sight of a light or two a long way down the dusky reach, as it seemed, with a brighter gleam to starboard where the land, catching the moonlight, came in visionary streaks and breaks

to abeam and on past the quarter where it seemed to melt out into some twinkling beacon—off Calshot Castle, maybe, so far astern it looked.

I spied the sturdy figure of the mate standing beside the wheel, no longer steering, but manifestly conning the yacht. The skipper was abreast of the skylight, leaning over the rail with his arm round a backstay; there were figures moving forward tipping the gloom there with the scarlet points of glowing bowls of tobacco, but if they conversed it was in whispers. The stillness was scarce imaginable. It was heightened yet even to my fancy presently when, growing used to the light I spied the phantom figure of what was apparently a large brig clouded to her royals with pale canvas stemming the Solent outward bound some half a mile distant.

‘There is no dew,’ said I; ‘the moon shines purely, and is full of promise so far as fine weather goes. Well! here we are fairly started indeed. It is almost a dream to me, Miss Jennings, d’ye know?’ I continued, staring about me. ‘Three days ago I had no notice of anything having gone wrong with my cousin, and therefore little dreamt, as you will suppose, of what I was to enter upon this blessed afternoon. Three days ago! And now here am I heading into God knows what part of this mighty globe of ocean

as empty of all theory of destination as though I were bound in a balloon to the part the poets call interstellar space. How is it all to end, I wonder?’

She was pacing quietly by my side.

‘You think the pursuit a silly one, Mr. Monson?’

‘Yes, I do, and Wilfrid *knows* that I do. If he were not—— He is my cousin, Miss Jennings, and a dear friend, and you are his sister-in-law and dear to him, too, I am sure, and so I dare be candid with you. If it were not that he’ (I touched my forehead), ‘would he embark on such a quest as this?’

‘Yes,’ she replied, with just enough of heat, or temper, or whatever you like to call it, in her voice to render her utterance distinct with unconscious emphasis; ‘he adored his wife. Can a man tear his love into pieces in a day, as though it were no more than a tedious old letter? He thinks he hates her; he does so in a sense, no doubt; but in a sense, too, he still worships her. Mad! that is what you mean.’

I was beginning to protest.

‘Yes, it *is* what you mean, and you are right and wrong. If he does not pursue her, if he does not recover her, she is lost for ever. She is lost now, you will tell me. Ay,’ she cried with a little stamp, ‘lost so far as her husband’s heart goes,

so far as her honour is concerned ; but not so utterly lost as she will later be if she is not rescued from that—that man, who must be so served, Mr. Monson, as to render it impossible for him ever again to trouble the peace of another home, to break the heart of a noble-minded creature and rob a little infant of its mother. Hate him ! Oh, girl as I am, I declare before my Maker I would shoot him with my own hand ! ’

There was nothing in the least degree theatrical in her way of speaking. The words came in a hurry to her lips from her indignant heart, and I heard the sincerity of them so clearly in the mere utterance, I did not doubt for an instant that, put a pistol in her hand and set up the figure of the Colonel in front of her, she would have sought for his heart, if he had one, with the barrel of the weapon without so much as a sigh at having to kill him. I felt abashed ; her sincerity and resentment were overwhelming ; her strength of feeling, too, won a peculiar accentuation from the character of airy delicacy, of tender fragility, the moonlight gave to her fair and golden beauty. It was like listening to a volume of sounds poured forth by a singing bird, and wondering that such far-reaching melody should be produced by so small a creature.



‘I fear,’ said I, ‘you don’t think me very sincere in my sympathy with Wilfrid——’

‘Oh, yes, Mr. Monson,’ she interrupted; ‘do not suppose such a thing. It is not to be imagined that you should take this cruel and miserable affair to heart as he does, or feel it as I do, who am her sister.’

‘The truth is,’ said I, ‘it is impossible for a bachelor not to take a cynical view of troubles of this sort. A man was charged with the murder of his sweetheart. The judge said to him, “Had the woman been your wife, your guilt would not have been so great, because you would have no other means of getting rid of her save by killing her; but the unhappy creature whose throat you cut you could have sent adrift without trouble.” What I mean to say is, Miss Jennings, that a husband does not merit half the pity that is felt for him if his wife elopes. He is easily quit of a woman who is his wife only by name. I am for pitying *her*. The inevitable sequel, the disgrace, desertion, and the rest of it is as punctual as the indications of the hand of a clock. . . . But see how nimbly the “Bride” floats through all this darkness and quietude. We shall be passing that vessel shortly, and yet for canvas she might really be one of the pyramids of Egypt towing down Channel.’



We went to the rail to look, I, for one, glad enough to change the subject, for it was nothing less than profanity to be arguing with so sweet a little woman as this—in the pure white shining of the moon, too, and with something of an ocean freshness of atmosphere all about us—on such a gangrenous subject as the elopement of Lady Monson with Colonel Hope-Kennedy. Out of all my sea-going experiences I could not pick a fairer picture than was made by the brig we were passing, clad as she was in moonlight, and rising in steam-coloured spaces to mere films of royals motionless under the stars. She was a man-of-war; the white of her broad band, that was broken by black ports, gleamed like the ivory of pianoforte keys; her canvas was exquisitely cut and set, and trimmed as naval men know how—one yardarm looking backwards a little over another, the rounded silent cloths, faint in the radiance with a gleam as of alabaster showing through a delicate haze, and high aloft the tremor of a pennant like the expiring trail of a shooting star. All was as hushed as death upon her; her high bulwarks concealed her decks; nothing was to be seen stirring along the whole length of the shapely, beautiful, visionary fabric that, as we left her slowly veering away upon our quarter, looked to lose the substance of her form, as though

through the gradual absorption of the light her own white canvas made by the clearer and icy radiance of the soaring moon.

‘To think now,’ said I, ‘of the thunder of adamantine lips concealed within the silence of that heap of swimming faintness ! How amazing the change from the exquisite repose she suggests to the fierce crimson blaze and headlong detonations of a broadside flashing up the dark land and dying out miles away in a sullen roar. But, d’ye know, Miss Jennings, I shall grow poetical if I do not light another cigar. Women should encourage men to smoke. Nothing keeps them quieter.’

We exchanged a few words with Captain Finn, who, together with the mate, was keeping a bright look-out, and then resumed our walk, and, in a quiet chat that was ended only by a small bell on the forecastle announcing the hour of ten by four chimes, Miss Laura gave me the story of my cousin’s introduction to her family, described the marriage, talked to me about Melbourne and her home there, with more to the same purpose, all very interesting to me, though it would make the merest parish gossip in print. Her mother was dead ; her father was a hearty man of sixty who had emigrated years before in dire poverty, ‘as you will suppose,’ said she, ‘when I tell you

that he was the son of a dissenting minister who had a family of twelve children, and who died without leaving money enough to pay for his funeral.' Mr. Jennings had made a fortune by squatting, but he had lost a considerable sum within the past few years by stupid speculation, and as Miss Laura said this I could see, by hearing her (to use a Paddyism) the pout of her lip ; for, bright as the moonlight was, the silver of it blended with the golden tint of her hair without defining any feature of her clearly saving her eyes, in which the beam of the planet would sparkle like a diamond whenever she raised them to my face. She told me her father was very proud that his daughter should become a lady of title, and yet he opposed the marriage, too. In short, he saw that Wilfrid's mind was not as sound as it should be, though he never could point to any act or speech to justify his misgivings. But this was intelligible enough ; for, to speak of my cousin as I remembered him in earlier times, the notion you got that he was not straight-headed, as I have before said, was from his face, and the suspicion lay but dully in one, so rational was his behaviour, so polished and often intellectual his talk ; till on a sudden it was sharpened into conviction on your hearing that there was insanity in his mother's family.

‘What had Lady Monson to say to your father’s misgivings?’ I inquired.

‘She accepted him, and insisted upon marrying him. He was wonderfully fond of her, Mr. Monson.’

‘And she?’

I saw her give her head a little shake, but she made no reply. Perhaps she considered that this trip we had started on sufficiently answered the question. She said, after a brief pause, ‘I myself thought my father a great deal too critical in his estimate of Sir Wilfrid. No one talked more delightfully than your cousin. He was a favourite with everybody whom he met at Melbourne. He was fresh from his travels, and was full of entertaining stories and shrewd observations; and then, again, he had much to say about European capitals, of English university life, of English society—you will not need me to tell you that we Colonials have little weaknesses in regard to lords and ladies and to the doings of high life, from which people in England are quite exempt, and for the having which I fear we are slightly sneered at and a good deal wondered at.’

I caught the sparkle of her lifted eye.

‘And pray, Miss Jennings,’ said I, ‘what would your papa think if he were to know that

you had embarked on what, I must still take the liberty of calling, a very queer voyage?'

'Oh,' she cried quickly and almost hysterically, 'don't ask me what he would think of what I am doing! What will be his thoughts when he gets the news of what Henrietta has done?'

She turned her head away from me, and kept it averted long enough to make me suspect that there was a tear in her eye. It was then that a sailor forward struck the forecastle bell four times.

'Ten o'clock!' she exclaimed, knowing as an ocean traveller how to interpret sea time. 'Good night, Mr. Monson.'

I handed her down the companion-steps, and went to my own cabin, and was presently in my bunk. But it was after seven bells, half-past eleven, before I fell asleep.

The breeze had freshened; had drawn apparently more yet to the northward, and the yacht having hauled it a bit now that we were out of the Solent, was leaning over a trifle with a sputtering and frisky snapping of froth along her bends and a quiet moaning sounding down into her heart out of the hollows of her canvas, whilst an occasional creak breaking from one knew not what part of the structure, hinted at a taut drag of tacks and sheets, though there was

no motion in the water over whose surface our keel slid as steadily as a sleigh over a snow-covered plain.

It was one thing on top of another, I suppose ; the fancies put into me by the oddness of this adventure ; the memory of the long gun forward ; Wilfrid's tragic intentions, the darker to my mind because it was so easy for me to see how grief, wrath, a sense of dishonour, bitter injury, with impulses not imaginable by me which every recurrence to the motherless little baby at home would visit him with, had quickened in him of late the deadly seminal principle that circulated in his blood. Then again, there was Miss Laura's beauty, if beauty be the proper term to express a combination of physical charms which a brief felicitous sentence like a single line from some old poet would better convey than fifty pages of description ; her conversation ; her sympathy with the motive of this trip ; her apparent heedlessness as to the time to be occupied by it ; her indifference as to the magnitude of the programme that Wilfrid's resolution to recover his wife might end in framing if Table Bay should prove but a starting point—I say it was one thing on top of another ; and all reflections and considerations being rendered acute by the spirit of life one now felt in the yacht, and that awakened the most



dormant or puzzled faculty to the perception that it was all grim, downright earnest, small wonder that I should have lain awake until half-past eleven. Indeed, that I should have snatched a wink of sleep that first blessed night is a mystery only to be partially resolved by reflecting that I was young, heedless, 'unencumbered' as they say, a lover of adventure, and in no sense dissatisfied by the company I found myself among.



## CHAPTER V.

## LONG TOM.

WHEN I awoke the morning was streaming a windy light through the port-hole over my bunk. I lay a few minutes watching my coat and other suspended garments swinging against the bulk-head, and listening to the creaking and groanings of partitions and strong fastenings, and to a muffled humming sound that was like the distant continuous roll of a drum mixed with a faint seething that sent one's fancy to the shingle of the English shore, and to the panting respiration of the recoiling breaker upon it; and then I guessed that there was a fresh breeze blowing.

I tumbled out of bed and stood awhile, partly with the notion of making sure of my legs and partly to discover if I was likely to be sea-sick. Finding myself happily sound in all ways, I drew on some clothing and looked out. Wilfrid's melancholy man sat at the cabin table, leaning his head upon his elbow with his fingers penetrating the black plaister of hair over his brow so that he

presented a very dejected and disordered appearance. I called to him, he looked in my direction with a wandering eye, struggled to get up, put his hand upon his stomach with an odd smile and sat again. I entered the cabin to see what ailed the fellow.

‘What’s the matter with you?’ said I. ‘Sick?’

He turned his hollow yellow face upon me, and I saw that he was in liquor.

‘It’s here, sir,’ he exclaimed, pointing with an inebriated forefinger to the lower button of his waistcoat; ‘it’s a feelin’, sir, as if I was a globe, sir, with gold and silver fishes a swimming round and round, and poking of their noses against me to get out.’

He spoke respectfully, but thickly, with sundry little feints at rising as though very sensible that he should not be sitting whilst I stood.

‘Try a dose of brandy,’ said I, satirically.

‘Do you think it will help me, sir?’ he inquired, pulling his fingers out of his hair and clasping his hands upon his waistcoat, whilst his lips went twisting into an intoxicated grin on one side of his nose, as it looked. ‘I will try it, Mr. Monson, sir. There’s a something here as wants settling, sir. I never was partial to the hocean, sir.’

He was proceeding, but just then the second

steward came below, on which I quitted the melancholy man, ordered a cold salt-water bath and a hot cup of coffee and was presently on deck. It was a windy-looking morning, the sky high, grey, compacted; with here and there a dark curl of scud in chase of some bald lump of sulphur-coloured cloud blowing away to leeward like the first ball of powder smoke from a cannon's mouth ere the wind has had time to shred it. The water was green, a true Channel sea with the foam of the curled ridges dazzling out in times to the touch of a wet, pale beam of sunshine dropping in a lance of light in some breathless moment through one of the dim blue lines that here and there veined the dulness aloft. There was no land to be seen; the haze of the sea line ran the water into the sky, and the green of the horizon went blending into the soft greyness of the heavens till it looked all one with a difference of colour only.

The yacht was bowling through it at a noble pace; the wind sat as it should for such a craft as the 'Bride'; the sea had quartered her and swept in hillocks of foam along her lustrous bends, sending an impulse to her floating rushes with every pale boiling of it to her frame, and the sputter and creaming all about her bows, and the swirl of the snow over the lee rail, and the milk-white race

of wake rising and falling fan-shaped astern prismatic with the glint of chips and bubbles and feathers of spume swept out of the giddiness by the rush of the wind, might have made you think yourself aboard a ship of a thousand tons. Upon my word it was as though the 'Bride' had got the scent and knew that the 'Shark' was not far distant. Finn was not sparing her. He was to windward, close beside the wheel, as I emerged, and I knew he watched me whilst I stood a moment in the hatch looking from the huge thunderous hollow of the mainsail to the yawn of the big square-sail they had clapped upon her with the whole square topsail atop of *it*, topgallant sail stowed, but the jibs yearning from their sheets taut as fiddle-strings, as though they would bodily uproot the timber and iron to which they were belayed.

Something of the exhilaration of a real chase came into one with the glad roaring aloft and the saw-like spitting at the cutwater, and the sullen crash of the arching billow repulsed by the cleaving bow; and it was the instinct in me, I suppose, due to my early training and recollection of the long pursuit of more than one polacre and nimble-heeled schooner flush to the hatches with a living ebony cargo that made me send a look sheer over the bows in search of some shining quarry there.

There were three or four coasters in a huddle on the weather beam, their outlines sharp, but their substance of a dingy black against the yellowish glare of light over the water that way as though the East were finding reflection in it; and to leeward, a mile off, a full-rigged sailing ship on a bowline bound up Channel, and plunging her round bows with clumsy viciousness into the green hollows with a frequent lift of white water to above the cathead, where it blew in a storm of crystals into the head canvas.

‘Good morning, captain.’

‘Good morning, sir,’ answered Finn, knuckling his forehead in the old fashioned style. ‘Nice little breeze of wind, sir.’

‘Ay, one could pray for nothing better,’ said I, crossing over to him. ‘You’ve got a fine craft here certainly, captain; no stint of beam, and bulwarks stout and tall enough to serve the purpose of a pirate. And how finely she rounds forward to the eyes. Hillo! getting ready with your gun so soon?’

‘No, sir, only a cleaning of him,’ he answered with a grin.

They had removed the tarpaulin, and there stood the long piece, with a couple of seamen hard at work furbishing it up.

‘D’ye think,’ said I, making a step or two

towards the rail to bring us out of earshot of the fellow who was standing at the wheel, 'that Sir Wilfrid really means to let fly at the "Shark" should we overhaul her, if she refuses to heave to?'

'I don't doubt it, sir.'

'But how about your crew? Will they be willing, think you, to fire into a vessel that's a yacht like their own ship, that hails from the same port, and whose people may number amongst them acquaintances—old shipmates of your own men?'

'They'll obey orders, sir,' said he quietly, with an air of caution in his long face.

'Suppose it should come to our having to board the "Shark," captain, and she shows fight—are you going to get your men to hazard their lives in the face of the pacific articles they, I presume, have signed?'

'It'll never come to a fight, Mr. Monson,' he responded, 'though I don't say it may not come to our having to fire at the vessel to stop her; for you see if the Colonel commands Fidler to keep all fast and take no notice of us there'll be nothen for him but to obey: whilst stop her *we* must, do ye see, sir? But as to fighting——' he shook his head. 'No, sir; when the time's come for boarding they'll be willing to let us walk quietly



over the side no matter how much they may consider their feelings injured by our shooting at 'em. In short it's like this; ne'er a man aboard the "Shark" but knows what the Colonel and her Ladyship's gone and done; a good many I dessay are husbands themselves, not to speak of their being Englishmen, and ye may take it that ne'er a hand of 'em from Fidler down is going to resist Sir Wilfrid's stepping on board to demand his own.'

'You may be right,' said I; 'tis hard to say, though. Do our crew know the errand we are on?'

'Bound to it, sir. In fact, the shipping of that there gun wouldn't allow the job to remain a secret. But the "Shark" was away first, and if all Southampton had got talking of our intention it couldn't have signified, so far as consarns I mean their guessing at it aboard the "Shark."'

'You must have pushed your equipment forward with wonderful expedition?'

'Yes, sir; we worked day and night. Of course we was all ready for sea, but there would be many things a wanting for what might turn out a six or seven thousand mile run with ne'er a stoppage along the whole road of it.'

My eye was just then taken by something that glittered upon the mainmast within reach of a man's uplifted arm. I peered, imagining it to be

a little plate with an inscription upon it commemorating something that Wilfrid might have deemed worthy of a memorial. I caught Finn grinning.

‘D’ye see what it is, sir?’ said he.

I looked again, and shook my head. He walked to the mast and I followed him, and now I saw that it was a handsome five-guinea piece, obviously of an old date—but it was too high to distinguish the impress clearly—secured by a couple of little staples which gripped without piercing or wounding it.

‘That piece of money,’ said Finn, ‘is for the first man that sights the “Shark.”’

‘Ha!’ I exclaimed, ‘an old whaling practice. My cousin has not viewed the world for nothing!’

It was but a trifling thing, yet in its way it was almost as hard a bit of underscoring of my cousin’s resolution as the long grinning piece they were cleaning forward, or the stand of arms against the bulkhead below.

‘What’s the pace, captain?’

‘A full ten, sir, by the last heave of the log.’

I fell a whistling—for it was grand sailing, surely—with a lift of my eye to the topgallant sail that lay stowed in a snow-white streak with a proper man-of-war’s bunt amidships on the slender black yard.

‘Well, sir,’ said Finn, taking it upon himself to interpret my glance, ‘I know the “Bride,” and I’m likewise acquainted with a good many vessels which ain’t the least bit in the world like her, and my notion’s this, that a craft ’ll do no more than she *can* do. I’ve hove the log to reefed canvas, and I’ve hove it in the same wind to whole sails and found a loss. No use of burying what you want to keep afloat. I might set that there little top-gallant sail without enjoying a hinch of way more out of it. Then what ’ud be the good of straining the spars?’

‘But you’ll be setting stun’ sails, I suppose, when a right chance for running them aloft occurs?’

‘Ay, sir. There’s the boom irons all ready. But my notion is, in a vessel of this sort, that it’s best to keep your stun’ sail booms out of sight till your anchors are stowed. Once out of soundings, and then let a man cut what capers he likes.’

As he said this, up rose my cousin’s long body through the companion hatch. He stood a little looking about him in his short-sighted way, but with an expression of satisfaction upon his face that gave a new character to it. I saw him rub his hands whilst he grinned to the swift salt rush of the wind. He caught sight of me, and instantly approached.

‘This will do! this will do, Charles!’ he cried,

grasping my hand. 'Don't spare her, captain. These are slants to be made the most of. By heaven, but it makes a new man of me to see such a sight as *that*!' pointing to the white torrent that was roaring past to leeward.

He stared with a sort of pathetic eagerness at the vessels which we were passing as though they had their anchors down, afterwards shading his eyes for another long yearning look over either bow.

'It is fine, though! it is fine, though!' he muttered with the spirit of an unreasonable exhilaration working strong in every feature. 'What is it, captain? Twelve?' Finn gave him the figure. 'And what would be the "Shark's" pace supposing her yonder?'

'Not all ours, Sir Wilfrid, not all ours,' responded Finn, 'though it is a fine sailing breeze, your honour. A craft would have to be a sawed-off-square consarn not to wash handsomely along this morning, sir.'

'How have you slept, Wilfrid?' said I.

'Well,' he answered. 'But I say, Charles, what do you think?' said he with a sudden boyish air that startled me with its suggestion of stupidity in him. 'Muffin is drunk.'

'Drunk!' cried I; 'but who the deuce is Muffin?' forgetting the name.

‘Why, my man,’ he answered; ‘my valet. It’s very odd. I thought at first it was sea-sickness. He’s been crying. The tears, I give you my word, streamed down his cheeks. He begs to be set ashore, and swears that if he should choke with one of the fish that are swimming about in him, his mother and two sisters would have to go to the Union. Do you think he’s mad?’

‘Drunk, and sea-sick too,’ said I. ‘Has he not been away with you on a yachting trip before?’

‘No. This is a handsome vessel, don’t you think, Charles?’ he exclaimed, breaking from the subject as though it had never been in his mind, and following on his question with a curious fluttering smile and that trembling of the lids I have before described; though his gaze steadied miraculously as they rested upon the gun the fellows were at work upon, and a shadow came into his face which was as good as telling me that I need not respond to his inquiry, as his thoughts were already elsewhere.

‘Let’s go and have a look at my cannon,’ said he with the same odd boyish manner he had discovered a minute or two earlier.

We walked forward; the decks had been some time before washed down and were sand dry, white as a tree newly stripped of its bark,

with a glitter all about them of the crystals of salt. The rigging was everywhere neatly coiled down; whatever was of brass shone as though it reflected a sunbeam; no detail but must have satisfied the most exacting nautical eye with an indication of frigate-like neatness, cleanliness, finish, and fore and aft discipline. The 'Bride,' after the manner of many yachts of those days, carried a galley on deck abaft her foremast. I peeped in as I passed and took notice of a snug little interior, brilliant with polished cooking vessels, and as clean and sweet as a dairy. A few of the sailors were standing about it waiting (as I took it) for the cook to furnish the messes with their breakfast. They had the air of a rough resolute set of men, with something of the inspiration of the yachting business, perhaps, in their manner of saluting Sir Wilfrid and myself, but with little of the aspect of the seafarer of the pleasure vessel of *these* times. They were bushy-whiskered hard-a-weather fellows for the most part, with one odd face amongst them as yellow and wrinkled as the skin of a decayed lemon.

I asked Wilfrid carelessly if any of his crew had sailed with him before. He answered that a few of them had; but that the others had declined to start on a voyage to the end of which Finn was unable to furnish a date, so that the captain



had made up the complement in a hurry out of the best hands he could find cruising about ashore. So this, thought I, accounts for the absence of that uniformity of apparel one looks for amongst the crews of yachts; yet all the sailors I had taken notice of were dressed warmly in very good clean nautical clothes, though I protest it made one think of the old picaroon and yarns of the Spanish Main to glance at one or two of the dry, tough, burnt, seawardly chaps who concealed their pipes and dragged a curl upon their foreheads to us as we passed them.

Wilfrid stared at his eighteen-pounder as though he were some lad viewing a toy cannon he had just purchased. He bent close to it in his near-sighted way, and looked it all over whilst he asked me what I thought of it. I saw the two fellows who were still at work upon it chew hard on the junks in their cheek-bones in their struggle to keep their faces.

‘Why,’ said I, ‘it seems to me a very good sort of gun, Wilfrid, and a thing, when fired, I’d rather stand behind than in front of.’

‘I should have had two of them,’ said he with a momentary darkening of his looks to the rising in him of some vexing memory, pointing as he spoke to the bow ports, ‘but Finn thought one piece of such a calibre enough at this end of

the vessel, and it would have been idle to mount a stern-chaser; for what we want to fire at—should it come to it—we can always manage to keep yonder,' nodding in the direction of the jibboom.

I had no mind to talk with him in the presence of the two fellows, one of whom I would see screw up his eye like the twist of a gimblet at us whilst he went on polishing; so I stepped into the head to take a view of the shear of the cut-water as it drove knife-like into each green freckled and glass-smooth side of surge rolling transversely from us ere shattering it into a snow-storm; but the bulwarks being too tall to enable me to see all that I looked for, I sprang on to the bowsprit and laid out to the jibboom end, which I jockeyed, holding on to a stay and beckoning to Wilfrid to follow; but he shook his head with a loud call to me to mind what I was about.

One may talk of the joy of a swift gallop on horseback when the man and the animal fit like hand and glove, when all is smooth running, with a gallant leap now and again; but what is a flight of that sort compared with the sensations you get by striding the jibboom of such a schooner as the 'Bride' and feeling her airily leap with you over the liquid hollows which yawn right under you, green as the summer leaf or purple as the violet for a

moment or two, before the smiting stem fills the thunderous chasm with the splendour of a cloud of boiling froth! It was a picture to have detained me an hour, so noble was the spectacle of the leaning yacht for ever coming right at me as it seemed, the rounds of her canvas whitened into marble hardness with the yearn and lean of the distended cloths to a quarter of the sea where hung a brighter tincture of sky through some tenuity of the eastern greyness behind which the sun was soaring. One felt a life and soul in the little ship in every floating bound she made, in every sliding blow of the bow that sent a vast smooth curl of billow to windward for the shrill-edged blast to transform into a very cataract of stars and diamonds and prisms! Lovely beyond description was the curtsying of her gilt figure-head and the refulgence of the gold lines all about it to the milk-white softness that seethed to the hawse-pipes.

I made my way inboards and said to Wilfrid, who stood waiting for me, 'She's a beauty. She should achieve your end for you if it is Table Bay only you are thinking of. But yonder great horizon!' I exclaimed, motioning with my hand. 'We are still in the narrow sea—yet look how far it stretches! Think then of the Atlantic circle.'

'We shall overhaul her!' he exclaimed quickly,

with a gesture that made an instant's passion of his way of speaking. 'Come along aft, Charles, and stump it a bit for an appetite. Breakfast can't be far off now.'

Miss Laura did not make her appearance until we were at table. I feared that the 'Bride's' lively dance had proved too much for her, and glanced aft for the maid that I might ask how her mistress did. Indeed, though on deck one gave no heed to the rolling and plunging of the yacht, the movements were rendered mighty sensible in the cabin by the swift, often convulsive, oscillations of lamps and swing-trays, by the sliding of articles of the breakfast equipment in the fiddles, by the monotonous ticking-like noise of doors upon their hooks, the slope of the cabin floor, sounds like the groanings of strong men in pain breaking in upon the ear from all parts, and above all by sudden lee-lurches which veiled the port-holes in green water, that sobbed madly till it flashed, with a shriek and a long dim roar, off the weeping glass lifted by the weather roll to the dull grey glare of the day.

But we had scarcely taken our seats when the girl arrived, and she brought such life and light and fragrance in her mere aspect to the table, that it was as though some rich and beautiful flower of a perfume sweetened yet by the coolness of dew

had been placed amongst us. She had slept well, she said, but her maid was ill and helpless. 'And where is Muffin?' she demanded.

'He's a lying down, miss,' exclaimed the head steward; 'he says his blood-wessels is that delicate he's got to be werry careful indeed.'

Wilfrid leaned across to her and said, in a low voice that the steward might not hear him, but with the boyish air that I had found odd and even absurd strong in him again, 'Laura, my dear, imagine! Muffin is *drunk*.' He broke into a strong, noisy laugh. 'Weepingly drunk, Laura; talks of himself as a globe of fish, and indeed,' he added, with a sudden recovery of his gravity, 'so queer outside all inspirations of the bottle that I'm disposed to think him mad.' Again he uttered a loud ha! ha! peering at me with his short sight to see if I was amused.

A look of concern entered Miss Jennings' face, but quickly left it, subdued, as I noticed, by an effort of will.

'I was afraid that Muffin would not suit you,' she exclaimed, quietly. 'I told you so, I remember. Those yellow, hollow men are miserable sailors. He has all good qualities as a valet on shore, but——' she was proceeding when he interrupted her.

'I say, Laura, isn't this breeze magnificent,

eh? Think, my dear—ten knots an hour! We are sweeping through it as though we were in tow of a comet. Why, if the devil himself were ahead we should overhaul him at this pace.'

He dropped his knife and fork as though to rub his hands—an action common to him when gratified—but his face darkened, a wild expression came into it with a sudden savage protrusion of his projecting under-lip to the bitter sneer of the upper one; he fell again to eating in a hurry, breathing short and masticating viciously with now and again a shake of the head, until all at once, ere he had half made an end of what was before him, he pushed his plate violently away and lay back in his chair, with his arms tightly folded upon his breast and his gaze intently fixed downwards, in a way to make me think of that aunt of his whom the old earl had pointed out to his father as she paced the green sward betwixt two keepers.

With the easiest air imaginable, though it was impossible that she could effectually blind to my sight the mingled expression of worry and dismay in her eyes as she directed them at me, Miss Jennings, making the breakfast upon the table her text, prattled about the food one gets on board ship, seizing, as it seemed to me, the first common-place topic she could think of.



I took an askant view of the stewards to see if they noticed Sir Wilfrid, but could find nothing to interpret in their wooden, waiting faces. After a little he seemed to wake up, coming back to his mind, as it were, with a long, tremulous sigh, and a puzzled look round at the table as though wondering whether he had breakfasted or not. Miss Jennings and I chatted common-places. He called for a cup of tea, and then, after listening with plenty of intelligence in his manner to a little experience I was relating to Miss Laura concerning the recovery of a captain's pig that had been washed overboard in a sudden squall, he described a gale of wind he had encountered off Agulhas whilst on a voyage to India, during which the cuddy front was stove in, and an immense sow and her young, along with a fine specimen of an English cart-horse and a cow, washed bodily aft, and swept in thunder down the broad staircase in the saloon that conducted to the berths and living-room for what were then termed the steerage passengers. No story was ever more graphically related. He described the panic amongst the passengers, the horrible concert produced by the screams of the pigs and the terrified moaning and bellowing of the cow, the uproar of the cart-horse's plunging hoofs against the resonant bulkheads, mingled with the shrieks

of the people who were in bed and imagined the ship to be already under water; I say he described all this so well, with so keen an appreciation of the humour, as well as of the horror of the scene, with a delivery so free from all excitement, that it seemed almost incredible he should be the same man that just now sat fixed in the posture of a melancholy madman with a face, as I might have thought, dark with the shadow of eclipsed reason.

Breakfast ended, he quitted the table to fetch his pipe.

‘I had better have come without a man, after all,’ said he, laughing; ‘one condition of sea-going should be that a fellow must help himself; and, upon my word, it comes to it no matter how many servants he brings with him. ’Tis the same ashore too, after all. It is the mistress who does most of the waiting;’ and thus pleasantly speaking he went to his cabin.

Miss Laura made as if to rise.

‘An instant, Miss Jennings,’ said I. ‘I have seen nothing of Wilfrid of late years. You, on the other hand, have been a good deal thrown with him during the last three months. Tell me, then, what you think of his manner and language just now—that piece of behaviour, I mean, from

which he started, so to speak, into perfect rationality?’

‘It was a sort of mood,’ she answered, speaking low, ‘that I have noticed in him, but never before saw so defined.’

‘It was madness,’ said I, with a shake of the head.

‘The shadow of a passing mood of madness,’ said she. ‘Was he on deck with you before breakfast?’

I answered yes.

‘Were his spirits good?’

‘Irrationally good, I thought. It was the sight of the flying schooner, no doubt, the picture of the running seas, the sense of headlong speed, with the black grin of the forecastle gun to quicken his wild craving into a very delirium of expectation and hope. But that kind of glee is quite as alarming as his melancholy.’

‘Yes, but you will find his melancholy strong as his spirits seem high. Do I make myself understood, Mr. Monson?’

‘Quite. One moment, you mean, he is looking down upon this extraordinary plan of his—this goose-chase, I must call it, with a bounding heart from the edge of a chasm the next he is at the very bottom of the pit gazing upwards in an anguish of dejection. The deeper the preci-

pice the gloomier the depth where he brings up. Certainly I understand you, Miss Jennings. But here is now a consideration that is bothering me,' I continued, sending a look aft, and up at the open skylight and around, to make sure that we were unheard. 'I am his cousin. As his associate in this voyage I have a right to regard myself as his best friend, for the time being anyway. Now what is my duty in the face of a condition of mind whose capriciousness fills it with menace? He brings me here as his right-hand man to help him, but to help him in or to what? I seem to understand his programme, yet I protest I cannot render it intelligible to my own common sense. Many might think me "wanting" myself to be here at all; but I will not go into that; what I mean is, is it not my duty to hinder him if possible from prosecuting a chase which, in my humble judgment, by continuing to irritate him with the disappointment of hope, may end in rendering organic what is now, let us pray, merely functional and fugitive?'

'You may try, but I do not think you will succeed,' she exclaimed. 'Indeed,' she cried, raising her voice, but immediately and nervously subduing it. 'I hope you will *not* try, for it is not hard to foresee what must follow. You will merely make his resolution more stubborn by

rendering it angrier than it is, and then there might come a coolness between you—indeed, something worse than coolness on his side; for in such minds as your cousin's it is impossible to imagine what dangerous ideas opposition may provoke.'

I bowed in recognition of the truth of this, admiring in her a quality of sagacity that, to the fancy at all events of a young man as I then was, would gather a new excellence from her graces. She looked at me with a tremble of light in her gaze that vexed its serenity.

'Besides, Mr. Monson, we must consider Henrietta.'

'It is natural you should think wholly of her,' said I.

'Not wholly. But this pursuit *may* end in rescuing her from Colonel Hope-Kennedy. It gives her future a chance. But you would have her husband sit quietly at home.'

'Well, not exactly,' I interrupted.

'What would you have him do?' she asked.

'Get a divorce,' said I.

'He won't do that,' she exclaimed. 'Marriage in his sight is a sacrament. Do not you know his views, Mr. Monson?'

'You see, I have long lost sight of him.'

'Well, I *know* he would not seek a divorce.

He would be mad indeed,' she cried, flushing to her brows, 'to give my sister the liberty she wants, and Colonel Hope-Kennedy——' She faltered and stopped, biting her underlip, with the hot emotions which mounted to her face imparting a sudden air of womanly maturity to her girlish beauty, whilst her breast rose and fell to her ireful breathing. 'This is no mad pursuit,' she continued after a brief pause, speaking softly. 'What is there unreasonable in a man's determination to follow his wife that he may come as swiftly as the ship, the coach, the railway will permit him between her and a life of shame and remorse and misery?'

As she spoke, my cousin arrived, holding a great meerschaum pipe in his hand. She at once rose and left the table with a faint smile at me and a glance on top of it that was as eloquent as a whisper of regret at having been betrayed into warmth. Well, thought I, you are a sweet little woman, and it is highly probable that before I have been a week in your company I shall be head over ears in love with you. But for all that, you fair and artless creature, I don't agree with you in your views of this chase. Suppose Wilfrid recaptures his wife—what is he going to do with her? She is not a lunatic; he cannot lock her up—but I broke off to the approach of my



cousin, fetched my pipe, and went on deck with him.

After all it was about time I should now see that, though we might shape a course for the yacht and give the wind the name of the compass points whence it blew, Chance was our skipper and helmsman, and the regions into which he was leading us as blind and thick as smoke. Throughout life and in all things it is the same, of course ; we sail with a fog that stands wall-like at the bows of our intentions, receding inch by inch with our advance, and leaving the water clear on either hand and astern, but ahead it remains for ever as thick as mud in a wine-glass. Anyhow, the chase was a sort of consolation to Wilfrid ; it had Miss Laura's approval, and there was hope enough to be got out of it according to her to render her trustful. But for my part I could only view it as a yachting excursion, and I particularly felt this when I stepped on deck with my cousin, spite of my quite recent talk with his sweet sister-in-law, and felt the sweep of the strong wind, and caught the roar of the divided waters sounding a small thunder upon the ears after the comparative calm of the breakfast-table below.

## CHAPTER VI.

## FINN TESTS THE CREW'S SIGHT.

LITTLE of interest happened at the outset. There were but three of us for company; our ship was a small one, and the inner life of it a monotonous round of eating, drinking, smoking, of taking the wheel, of pendulously stumping the quarter-deck, of keeping a look-out, of scrubbing and polishing, and making and shortening sail; whilst outside there was nothing but weather and sea; so that in a very short time I had lapsed into the old ocean trick of timing the passage of the hours by meals.

But that I may not approach in a staggering or disjointed way the huddle of astonishments which *then* lay many leagues distance past the gleam of the sea-line towards which our bowsprit was pointing, I will enter here in a sort of log-book fashion a few of the interests, features and spectacles of this early passage of our singular excursion.

The fresh wind ran us well down Channel.

Hour after hour the 'Bride' was driving the green seas into foam before her, and there was a continuous fretful heaving of the log to Wilfrid's feverish demands, until I think, before we were two days out, the very souls of the crew had grown to loathe the cry of 'turn!' and the rattle of the reel.

That same morning—the morning I mean that I have dealt with in the last chapter—after Wilfrid and I had been smoking a little while under the lee of the tall bulwark which the wind struck and recoiled from, leaving a space of calm in the clear above it to the height of a man's hand, my cousin, who had been chatting with the utmost intelligence on a matter so remote from the object of this chase as a sale of yearlings which he had attended a few weeks before, sprang to his feet with the most abrupt breaking away imaginable from what he was talking about, and called to Captain Finn, who was coming leisurely aft from the neighbourhood of the galley with a sailorly eye upturned at the canvas and a roll of his short legs that made you think he would feel more at home on all fours.

'Finn,' cried Wilfrid, 'there is no one on the look-out!' and he pointed with his long awkward arm at the topgallant yard.

'Why hardly yet, sir,' began Finn.

‘Hardly *yet!*’ interrupted Wilfrid, ‘my orders were, day and night from the hour of our departure.’

‘Beg your honour’s pardon, I’m sure, sir,’ said Finn. ‘I didn’t quite take ye as meaning to be literal. Five days’ start, you know, Sir Wilfrid——’

‘What is that to *me?*’ cried my cousin impetuously; ‘it’s the unexpected you’ve got to make ready for at sea, man. Figure something having gone wrong with the “Shark”—her masts overboard—a leak—fire. Anyway,’ he cried with the heat of a man who means to have his will but who grows suddenly sensible of the weakness of his arguments, ‘have a fellow stationed aloft day and night. D’ye hear me, Finn?’

‘Certainly I hear you, Sir Wilfrid.’

He knuckled his forehead, and was in the act of moving away to give directions, when my cousin stopped him.

‘No use sending *blind* men aloft, Finn—mere gogglers like myself, worse luck! You must find out the men with eyes in their heads in this ship.’

Finn hung in the wind, sending a dull rolling glance at the five guinea piece nailed to the main-mast. ‘If it worn’t for that,’ he exclaimed, pointing to it, ‘it wouldn’t matter; but if I pick and choose,

'twill be like stirring up the inside of a sty. The men 'll argue that the piece of money is for the first man that sights the "Shark," and they'll think it hard that a few of them only should be selected to stand a look-out aloft; for it will be but one of 'em that's chosen as can aim the money.'

'Very true,' said I.

'Confound it, Charles!' cried my cousin angrily, 'what'll be the good of posting a short-sighted man up there?'

'All hands, Captain Finn, have got two eyes apiece in their heads?' said I.

'All, sir,' he answered after a little reflection, 'saving the mate, and he's got two eyes too; only one makes a foul hawse of t'other.'

'You may take it, Wilfrid,' said I, 'that your men are able to see pretty much alike.'

'Is there no way of testing the fellows' sight?' cried Wilfrid excitedly, with an unnecessary headlong manner about him as though he would heave his body along with every question he put or exclamation he uttered; 'then we could uproot the moles among them. Dash me, Finn, if I'm going to let the "Shark" slip astern of us for want of eyesight.'

The skipper sent a slow uncertain look around the horizon, evidently puzzled; then his face cleared a bit. He went to the weather rail

and stared ahead, crossed to leeward and fastened his eyes on the sea on the lee bow, then coming up to windward again he hailed a man who was at work upon the topsail yard doing something to one of the stirrups of the foot-rope.

‘Aloft there!’

‘Hillo!’

‘Jump on to the topgallant yard and let me know if there’s anything in sight ahead or on either bow?’

‘Ay, ay, sir.’

The fellow got upon the yard, and leaned from it with one hand grasping the tie, whilst with the other he shaded his eyes and took a long whaling look. His figure was soft and firm as a pencil drawing against the hard and windy greyness of the heavens, and the rippling of his trousers to the wind, the yellow streak of his lifted arm naked to the elbow, the inimitable, easy, careless pose of him as he swayed to the swift vibrations of the spar on which he stood with the ivory white curves of the jib and stay foresail going down past him till they were lost forward of the topsail that yawned in a shadowed hollow which looked the duskier for the gleam of the pinion of staysail this side of it, made a little sea picture of quiet but singular beauty.

‘Nothing in sight, sir,’ he bawled down.



Finn raised his hand in token that he heard him and turned to Wilfrid.

‘Now sir,’ said he, ‘something’s bound to be heaving into view shortly ahead of us. We might test the men thus; one watch at a time; two men on the topgallant yard, which can be hoisted without setting the sail; four men on the topsail yard; and two men on the foreyard. I’ll send Crimp on to the forecastle to see all’s fair. There’s to be no singing out; the man that sees the sail first is to hold up his arm. That’ll test the chaps on the topgallant yard who from the height they’re posted at are bound to see the hobject first; then it’ll come to the tops’l yard and then to the foreyard. What d’ye say, sir? It’ll take the men off their work, but not for long I reckon, for something’s bound to show soon hereabouts.’

‘An excellent notion,’ shouted Wilfrid gleefully, all temper in him gone. ‘Quick about it, Finn; and see here, there’ll be a crown piece for the man on each yard who’s the first to hold up his arm.’

‘That’ll skin their eyes for ’em,’ rumbled Finn in a half-suppressed hurricane note, and he went forward grinning broadly.

The port watch were mustered; I heard him explaining; the cock-eyed mate walked sulkily to

the fore-castle and took up his place between the knight-heads in a sullen posture; his arms folded and his eyes turned up. 'Away aloft!' there was a headlong rush of men, the rigging danced to their springs, and in a few moments every yard had its allotted number of look-outs.

It was not a test to believe in, for the instant an arm on the topgallant yard was brandished the fellows below would know that something had hove into view, and the dishonest amongst them, calculating upon its appearance in due course, might flourish their fists before their eyes gave them the right to do so. However, Wilfrid looked hugely pleased, and you witnessed the one virtue of the test in *that*. He bet me a sovereign to ten shillings that the man on the port topgallant yard-arm would be the first to lift his hand. I took him, and then naturally found the affair interesting.

In the midst of this business Miss Jennings arrived, cosily dressed in a jacket that fitted her shape and a little hat that looked to be made of beaver curled on one side to a sort of cockade where a small black plume rattled to the wind as I caught her hand and conducted her to my chair under the bulwarks. She started when she saw those sailors aloft all apparently staring in one

direction with the intentness which the inspiration of five shillings would put into the nautical eye.

‘What is in sight?’ she exclaimed, looking round at Wilfrid with a pale face. ‘Surely—surely——’

I explained, whilst my cousin, rubbing his hands together and breaking into a loud but scarcely mirthful laugh, asked if she did not think it was a magnificent idea.

‘Positively,’ she cried with alarm still bright in her eyes, ‘I believed at first that the “Shark” or some vessel like her was in sight. But Wilfrid, when a man climbs up there to look-out, will not he have a telescope?’

‘Yes, by day,’ he answered, ‘and a night-glass when the dark comes.’

‘Then what good is there in that sort of test?’ she inquired. ‘The shortest-sighted man with a telescope at his eye would be able to see miles farther than the longest sighted.’

‘Aye,’ cried my cousin, ‘but a good sight’ll see further through a glass than a feeble one, and I want to find out who have got the good sight amongst those fellows.’

I saw her peep askant at me, to gather what I thought of this business. Very clearly she found nothing but childishness in it. Meanwhile

Wilfrid kept his large weak eyes fixed upon the two fellows on the topgallant yard. They might have been a couple of birds perched on a bough and he a great hungry tom cat watching them. Finn was at the wheel, having sent the man who had been steering to join the others aloft. The mate on the forecastle looked sulkily up; the growling that was going on within him, and his astonishment and scorn of the whole proceeding, were inimitably expressed in his posture. Twenty minutes passed. I was sick of staring, and filled another pipe, though without venturing to speak, for the breathless intensity of expectation in Wilfrid's manner, along with the eager, aching, straining expression of his face upturned to where the men were, was a sort of spell in its way upon one, and I positively felt afraid to break the silence. On a sudden the man on the port side of the topgallant yard raised his hand, and in the space of a breath afterwards up went the other fellow's arm. But my cousin had won his bet; he hit his leg a blow with boyish delight strong in his face.

‘A magnificent test, isn't it?’ he whispered, as though he feared his voice would travel aloft; ‘now watch the topsail yard. The fellows there haven't seen the gestures of the chaps above them. Another sovereign to ten shillings, Charles,

that the outermost man to windward will hold up his hand first.'

I took the bet, and, as luck would have it, he won again, for a very few minutes after the sail had been descried from the loftiest yard the man whom Wilfrid had backed signalled, and then up went the arms of the other three along with the arms of the two fellows who were stationed on the fore yard as though they were being drilled, whilst a rumble of laughter sounded from amongst a group of the starboard watch, who were standing near the galley awaiting the issue of the test.

The hands came down ; the mate set the crew to work ; the fellow whose trick it was, at the wheel relieved the captain, who walked up to us.

'That's what they sighted, sir,' he exclaimed, pointing ahead, where we could just catch a glimpse of an airy streak of a marble hue, which showed only whenever our speeding schooner lifted upon some seething brow that washed in thunder slantwise to leeward, but which presently enlarged to the proportions of a powerful cutter, apparently a revenue boat, staggering under a press as though in a hurry, steering north for an English port.

Wilfrid's satisfaction was unbounded ; his exuberance of delight was something to startle one, seeing that there was nothing whatever to

justify it. As I looked at him I recalled Miss Laura's remark as to fits of excessive gloom following these irrational soarings of spirits, and expected shortly to find him plunged in a mood of fixed black melancholy. He told Captain Finn to have the other watch tested in the same way before the day was out, and produced fifteen shillings, ten of which were to go to the two men whom he had backed, and half-a-crown a piece to the fellows on the fore yard. Finn took the money with an eye that seemed actually to languish under its load of expostulation, but he made no remark. He anticipated, as I might, indeed, that fathom after fathom of hoarse fore-castle arguments would attend this distribution, for assuredly the men on the foreyard were no more entitled to the money than the others who received none.

‘Now, captain,’ cried Wilfrid, ‘send the man who first sighted that sail yonder aloft at once. Let the foretopgallant yard be the look-out station; d’ye understand?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Call Muffin.’

But Muffin was too ill, or drunk, or both, to appear, so one of the stewards was summoned and ordered to bring from Sir Wilfrid's cabin a telescope that he would find in such and such a



place. The man returned with the glass, a lovely Dollond, silver-mounted.

‘Try it, Charles,’ my cousin said to me.

I pointed it at the cutter, and found the lenses amazingly powerful and brilliant. ‘A superb glass, indeed,’ said I, returning it to him.

‘Now, captain,’ said Wilfrid with that *raised* look I have before referred to, ‘I dedicate this glass to the discovery of the “Shark.”’ His teeth met in a snap as he spoke the word, and his breathing grew laboured. ‘Let this telescope be carried aloft by that topgallant yard man who was the first to lift his hand, and there let it remain, passing from sunrise to sunset from hand to hand as the look-outs are relieved. Never on any account whatever is it to be brought down from that masthead until the image of the craft we want is reflected fair in it. See to this, Finn.’

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ responded the captain with his long face still charged with expostulation, though you saw he would not have disputed for the value of his wages.

‘By-and-by,’ continued my cousin, ‘I’ll give you a night glass of equal power, to be dedicated to the same purpose.’

‘Thank ’ee, Sir Wilfrid; but your honour’—and here the worthy fellow looked nervously from Sir Wilfrid to me—‘am I to understand, sir, that

this here beautiful instrument,' handling it as if it were a baby, 'along with t'other which you're to give me, is to be kept aloft day and night no matter the weather?'

'Day and night, no matter the weather,' said Wilfrid, in a sepulchral voice.

'Very good, sir, but I should just like to say——'

'Now, pray, don't say anything at all,' interrupted my cousin, peevishly; 'you're losing time, Finn. Send that fellow aloft, will you? Gracious heaven! can't you see it makes one feel *desperate* to understand that there's nobody on the look-out?'

He jumped up and fell to pacing the deck with long, irritable strides. Finn, without another word, hurried forward. Presently the fellow who had first signalled sprang into the rigging with the glass slung over his shoulder. He ran nimbly aloft, and was speedily on the topgallant yard; and there he sat, with an arm embracing the mast, from time to time levelling the polished tube that glanced like a ray of light in his hand, and slowly sweeping the sea from one beam to another. Wilfrid came to a stand at sight of him; he clasped his arms on his breast, his gaze directed aloft, whilst he swayed on one leg with the other bent before him to the heave of the deck; his

melodramatic posture made one think of a Manfred in the act of assailing some celestial body with injurious language. It pained me to look at him. He was pale and haggard, but there was the spirit of high breeding in every lineament to give the grace of distinction and a quality of spiritual tenderness to his odd, irregular, uncomely face. He stared so long and so fixedly at the man that I saw the fellows forward looking up too, as though there must be something uncommon there to detain the baronet's gaze. After a while he let his arms drop with an awakening manner, and slowly sent his eyes around the sea in the most absent way that could be thought of till, his gaze meeting mine, he gave a start, and cried, with a flourish of one hand, whilst he pointed to the topgallant yard with the other, 'Day and night, Charles; day and night! And keep *you* on the look-out, too, will you, old friend? You carry a sailor's eye in your head, and have hunted under canvas before. We mustn't miss her! We mustn't miss her!' And with a shake of his head he abruptly strode to the companion and went below.

I sat with Miss Jennings under the shelter of the bulwarks until hard upon luncheon-time. Wilfrid did not again make his appearance on deck that morning. The girl asked me if the test the men's eyesight had been put to was my

cousin's notion. I answered that it was the captain's.

‘Then how stupid of him, Mr. Monson.’

‘Well, perhaps so,’ said I, ‘but I’m rather sorry for Finn, do you know. It is not only that he has to execute orders which he may consider ridiculous; he has to plot so as to harmonise the plain routine of shipboard life with Wilfrid’s irrational or extravagant expectations. But there is the mate. I have not spoken to him yet. Let’s hear what *he* thinks of the skipper’s testing job.’

He was pacing the lee quarter-deck, being in charge of the yacht, though Finn had been up and down throughout the morning, sniffing about uneasily as though he could not bear to have the picture of the little ship out of his sight too long. I called to him and he crossed over to us slowly, as though astonished that I should want him. His face had something of a Cape Horn look, with its slewed eye and a number of warts riding the wrinkles of his weather-seasoned skin, and a mat of hair upon his throat as coarse as rope-yarns. He was no beauty certainly, yet I fancied him somehow as a good seaman; maybe for the fore-castle sourness of his face and a general sulkiness of demeanour, which I have commonly found as expressing excellent sea-going principles.

‘You’re the mate, I think, Mr. Crimp?’ said I, blandly.

‘Yes, I’m the mate,’ he answered, staring from me to Miss Jennings, and speaking in a voice broken by years of bawling in heavy weather, and possibly, too, by hard drinking.

‘We’re blowing along very prettily, Mr. Crimp. If this breeze holds it cannot be long before we are out of soundings.’

‘No, I don’t suppose it will be long,’ he answered.

‘Do you know the “Shark?”’

‘Why, yes.’

‘Are we going to pick her up, think you?’

‘Well, if we gets into her wake and shove along faster nor she, there’ll be nothin’ to stop us picking her up,’ he answered, steadily viewin Miss Jennings and myself alternately, to satisfy his mind, as I took it, that we were not quizzin him.

‘I suppose,’ said I, ‘that the captain will be testing the eyesight of the other watch presently?’

‘Ay,’ said he, with a sort of sneer, ‘they’ll go aloft after dinner.’

‘Isn’t it a good test?’

‘Don’t see no use in it at all,’ he answered gruffly, sending a look aloft and following it o

with an admonitory stare at the fellow at the wheel. 'Suppose nothen had hove into view; the men 'ud be still on the yards a-watching. 'Sides, observing an object at sea depends upon where your eyes is. One chap may be looking in another direction when his mate sings out. Is that going to stand for a sign that his sight's poor?'

'What do the men think?' said I, anxious to get behind the forecastle, so to speak, for I was never to know how far knowledge of this kind might be serviceable to us later on.

'Why, the watch has been a-grumbling and a-quarrelling over the rewards. They say 'tain't fair. If t'other watch is to be tested on the same terms, stand by for something like a melhee, says I.'

'Oh, but that must be stopped,' I exclaimed, 'we want no "melhees" aboard the "Bride," Mr. Crimp.'

Just then I caught sight of Captain Finn. I beckoned to him, and the mate passed over to leeward, where he fell to pacing the deck as before. I told the skipper what Crimp had said, and he burst into a laugh.

'Melhees!' he exclaimed, 'that's just what old Jacob 'ud like. He's a regular lime-juicer, sir, and distils hacid at every pore: but he's a first-class seaman. I'd rather have that man by



my side at a time of danger than the choicest of all the sailors as I can call to mind that I've met in my day. But there'll be no melhee, sir—there'll be no melhee, lady. The men are grumbling a bit; and why? 'Cause they're sailors. But it'll be all right, sir. That there notion of testing, I don't mind owning of it to you, was merely to pacify Sir Wilfrid, sir. I'll carry out his orders, of course, and send the other watch aloft arter dinner. It'll have to cost another fifteen shillin', otherwise I don't mean to say there mightn't come a feeling of onpleasantness amcngrst the sailors. But Sir Wilfrid 'll not mind that, sir.'

I drew the money from my pocket and gave it him. 'Here,' said I, 'you needn't trouble Sir Wilfrid; I'll make it right with him. Only,' I exclaimed, 'keep the crew in a good temper. We do not want any disaffection. Heaven knows there's trouble enough aboard, as it is!'

He knuckled his forehead, and the luncheon bell now sounding, I handed Miss Jennings below; but I could not help saying to her, as we stood a moment together in the cabin, that I saw one part of my duty would lie in advising Wilfrid to have as little as possible to do with his crew and the working of the yacht; for grief and heart-bitterness had so sharpened his eccentricities that one never could tell what orders he might give of a

nature to lead to difficulty and trouble with the men. 'Perhaps,' I added, 'it might be thought that a sincere friendship would suffer him to have his way, in the hope that some measure of his would bring this goose-chase to an abrupt end and force him home. But, then, *you* are interested in the pursuit, Miss Jennings, and heaven forbid that any active or passive effort, or influence, or agency of mine, should hinder you from realising the hope with which you have embarked on this strange adventure.'

## CHAPTER VII.

## SAIL HO !

A CHARACTERISTIC of Wilfrid's mental feebleness was his inability to keep his attention long fixed. This symptom would be more or less acute according to the hold his trouble had of him. He arrived at the luncheon table to the second summons, and I was really startled, after conversing with him a little, to gather from what he said that the whole incident of the testing of the men's eyesight had gone sheer out of his memory. This being so, no purpose could have been served by recurring to it, though, had he mentioned the subject, I had made up my mind to use it as a text that I might exhort him not to meddle with his crew, nor in any way step between Captain Finn and the navigation of the 'Bride.'

However I found something to raise a hope in me too, in his odd, variable, imperfect intellect; namely, that he might come presently to but dimly comprehend the purport of this voyage, and then I did not doubt of being able to influence him and

carry him back home, in short; for the wild uncertainty of the adventure was made to my mind more extravagant still by the inspiration of it being due to my poor cousin's weak brains; in fact, not to mince my meaning, it would have been a mad undertaking in the sanest man's hands; to my fancy then it became the completest expression of madness possible, when I thought of a madman as conceiving and governing it.

Finn, as I afterwards learnt, sent the other watch aloft whilst we were at lunch, and there they hung, staring away for an hour; when, just as the captain was about to sing out to them to come down, a fellow on the foreyard (the lowest of the three yards) signalled a sail, and then all hands saw it together! so, to arrest any further grumbling, Finn gave five shillings to the foreyard man and made the watch draw lots for the other two five-shilling prizes. This arrangement satisfied them, and it seemed to soothe the fellows in the other watch as well, who perhaps now perceived that there was little but inanity in the test, and that the only sensible way to treat the whole affair was to look upon it as a joke.

This I learnt afterwards from Finn, who did not show himself much surprised to hear that Sir Wilfrid had apparently forgotten the incident of the morning.

‘ You’ll forgive me saying of it, Mr. Monson,’ he exclaimed, ‘ seeing it is your own cousin I’m speaking about, sir ; but I’ve been master of his yacht now since he bought her for her ladyship, and I know this much of Sir Wilfrid, that his mind ain’t as if it were half the time with the orders he gives. He’ll say a thing without the eyes of his intellects being upon it. The result is that soon after the words is off his lips the sentiment of ’em is gone from his recollection. It is like breathing on a looking-glass ; there’s the mark, but it don’t last long.’

It came on a bit thick that afternoon, with now and again a haze of rain in the gust of a squall, sweeping like the explosion of a gun into the straining canvas out of the heart of the hard but steady breeze, and this weather, together with some strange edge of cold that had entered it since luncheon time, kept us below, though I was on deck for a little while when I had that chat with the skipper which I have just repeated. Wilfrid lighted his big pipe in the cabin, telling Miss Laura that she had given us leave to smoke there on the preceding night, an odd proof of his power to remember little things. The interior was a bit gloomy with the ashen atmosphere of the grey day sifting through the skylight and down the companion hatch, and with a green dimness coming

yet into it from time to time to the burying of the glass of the ports in the pale emerald of the clear brine under the froth that was roaring away past on the surface. But there was nothing much to incommode one in the movements of the vessel; wind and sea, as I have said, were on the quarter, and the lift of the tall Channel surge came soft as its own melting head to the weather counter, running the shapely fabric into a long arrowy floating launch ahead, with a lean down that was wrought by rhythmic action into a mere bit of cradle-play.

Snugged in the cushions of a most luxurious arm-chair, with the consoling scent of a fine cigar under my nose and a noble claret within arm's reach chilled to the temperature of snow by the richly-chased silver jug which contained it, I felt that there must be greater hardships in life than yachting, even when the sailing cruise came to a hunt for a runaway wife. Miss Jennings sat near me, with a novel in her lap, on whose open page her violet eyes would sometimes rest when the conversation languished. There was a mirror in the bulkhead just behind me and her hair shone in it as though a sunbeam rested on her tresses. Wilfrid lay at full length upon a couch, blowing clouds from his pipe with his large strange weak eyes fixed upon the upper deck. He talked a



good deal of his travels, always rationally and often with evidences of a shrewd perception ; but again and again he would withdraw his pipe from his mouth and seem to forget that he held it, sigh deeply, a long tremulous inspiration that was full of the tears of a heart which sobbed continuously, then start on a sudden, sit upright and send a crazy wandering look at the porthole near him ; after which he would stretch his form again and resume his pipe and fall to talking afresh, but never picking up the thread he had let drop, or speaking with the least reference to the anecdote, experience, incident, or what not, from whose relation he had just before broken.

Once he jumped up, after lying silent for five or ten minutes, during which Miss Jennings seemed to read, whilst I, thinking of nothing in particular, lazily watched the rings of cigar smoke I expelled float to the wreathing of flowers and foliage painted with delightful taste upon the cabin ceiling. His movement was extraordinarily abrupt ; he put his pipe down and stalked to his cabin—*stalk* is the one word that expresses my cousin's peculiar walk when any dark or strange mood was upon him—and I presumed that he had gone into hiding for a while ; but he quickly reappeared. There was a light in his eye and a spot of red on each high cheekbone as he put a

case in my hand, saying, 'Will these do, d'ye think, Charles?'

It contained a handsome pair of duelling pistols.

'Upon my word, Wilfrid,' said I, in an off-hand way whilst I toyed with one of the weapons as if admiring it, 'our little ship is not without teeth, eh? What with your gun forward and the small arms near my cabin, and now *these*—you'll be having a powder magazine on board, I suppose?'

'There'll be as much powder as we need, I dare say. What think you of those weapons?'

'They are quite killing. For what purpose are pills like these gilded so sumptuously? Is all this garnishing supposed to make death more palatable?'

Miss Laura extended her hand, and I gave her the weapon I was examining. A look came into her face that made me feel glad I wasn't Colonel Hope-Kennedy just then. She flushed to some thought with a sudden sweep of her gaze to the porthole, then looked again at the pistol while she bit her lip. I found something fascinating in this brief passage of spirit in her. Wilfrid, holding the other pistol, drew himself erect before a length of looking-glass against the starboard bulkhead, and levelled the weapon at his own reflection.

He stood motionless, save for the swaying of his figure upon the rolling deck, his head thrown back, his nostrils large, his countenance a sallow white ; it was absolutely as though he believed in the reality of his own impersonation, and waited for the signal to fire.

‘Bless me, Wilfrid!’ cried I, ‘I hope these affairs of yours aren’t loaded! Hair triggers, by Jingo! Mind—if they are—you’ll destroy that fine piece of plate glass.’

Of course I knew better ; but his rapt posture was a little alarming, and I said the first thing that came into my head to break the spell. His arm sank to his side, and he turned to me with a grin that was bewildering with its conflicting emotions of anger, misery, and triumph.

‘Let that man give me a chance!’ said he, in a low but deep voice.

‘Ay, but my dear boy,’ said I, relieved by his slowly returning the pistols to the case, ‘figure the boot on the other leg ;—supposing he kills *you*?’

‘Good God!’ cried he, ‘d’ye think *that* consideration would hinder me from attempting the life of the ruffian who has brought shame and dishonour upon me and my child?’

‘No,’ said I, with a glance at Miss Laura, whom I found eyeing me with a look of surprise that sparkled with something more than a hint of

temper; 'but if we should meet this fellow on the open sea, and you challenge him, and he should kill you, what will you have done for yourself? Suffered him to put you quietly out of the road and achieve the double triumph of first taking your wife from you and then making a widow of her!—which, of course, would answer his purpose very well, whether he designed matrimony or not, seeing that there could not be much peace of mind for him with the knowledge either that you were on his track, or waiting with spider-like patience in England for his return.'

'By heaven, Charles!' he roared out, 'no man but you would dare talk to me like this——'

I raised my hand. 'Wilfrid, nothing that you can say, no temper that you can exhibit, no menaces that you may utter, will prevent me from remembering that I am here at your earnest request as the one male friend you wished at your side in such a time, and from speaking to you as freely as I should think within myself. This, to be sure, is ridiculously premature. We have yet to fall in with the "Shark." Supposing *that* happens, and that Colonel Hope-Kennedy consents to fight you, and you insist, then it will not be for me to say you nay. But, believe me, nothing shall intimidate me from trying to make you understand that, honour or no honour, to give

that rascal an opportunity of assassinating you would be the very maddest act your most righteous wrath could hurry you into.'

He looked at me a little while in silence, was about to speak, checked himself, or may be it was his voice that failed him; a dampness came into his eyes, he compressed his lips till they were bloodless in the effort to suppress his tears; then flourishing his arm with a gesture grievously expressive of the anguish he was feeling at that moment, he went to his cabin, and we saw no more of him till dinner-time.

I thought Miss Jennings would rebuke me for what I had said, and I gathered myself together, in an intellectual sense, for a little gentle fencing with her for a bit; for, let her hate the Colonel as she might, and let her be as eager as she would that her sister should be speedily rescued from the villain she had sacrificed her honour for, I had made up my mind not to suffer her to imagine that I regarded a meeting between the two men as a necessary effect of the Colonel's action; but that, on the contrary, I should consider it my duty to vehemently discountenance a duel, until I found that there was nothing in argument to dissuade my cousin; when of course I would render him such services as he might expect from me.

In short, as you will see, I took a cold-blooded view of the whole business. The prosaic arbitrament of the law, *that* was my notion! The shears of a dispassionate judge! No, pistols and coffee for two, thank'ee! Methinks when it comes to one's wife preferring Jones or Tomkins to one's own lovely self, her new emotions should be helped, not by giving the latest darling of her heart the chance to kill one, but by starting one's attorney to play upon the blissful couple with the cold black venom of his ink-horn!

Miss Jennings, however, made no reference to my speech, nor to the manner of Wilfrid's going. She remained quiet and showed herself subdued and grieved for some time, and then we talked about the testing of the men's sight, and I repeated what Captain Finn had said to me on that subject. On a sudden she exclaimed:

'You told me, Mr. Monson, that you have never seen my sister?'

'No, only heard of her, and then quite indirectly.'

She went to her cabin, moving in a very inimitable, floating, graceful, yielding way to the heave of the deck, never offering to grasp anything for support, though the lee-lurches were at times somewhat staggering, and I thought I never saw a more perfect little figure as she withdrew,



her hair glowing when her form was already vague as she flitted into the shadow astern of the companion steps towards the dark corridor or passage which conducted to her cabin. She returned after a short absence with a miniature painting set in a very handsome case, on which was my cousin's crest with initials beneath, signifying that it was a gift from him to Laura Jennings. I carried it under the skylight to see it clearly.

‘When was this done?’ I asked.

‘About a year ago,’ she answered. ‘Wilfrid sent it to Melbourne as a gift to me.’

Now it might be that I was *then*—taste, of course, changes—no very passionate admirer of dark women; brunettes, I mean, of a South European sort, which the face in the miniature was after the pattern of; and that is why, no doubt, the expectation in me of the ripe and tropic graces I was to behold was not a little disappointed. Anyone could see by the likeness that Lady Monson was a fine woman; her hair was raven black, but there was a want of taste in the fashion in which it was dressed; her eyes were bright, imperious, rather too staring, with something of haughty astonishment in their expression; but this might have been the artist's misinterpretation of their character. She was as like her sister Laura as I was like *her*. Her

mouth was somewhat large, rich, voluptuous; the throat very beautiful, with something about the line or curve of the jaw which would have made you suspect, without knowing the original, that the character of this part of the face was exquisitely reproduced. It was a heaviness to communicate a slightly masculine air to the whole countenance. I turned to Miss Jennings and found her eyes intent on my face.

‘She is a handsome lady,’ said I, ‘handsomer I should think than she is here represented: quite apart, I mean, from the glow of countenance, the animation of look, and all the rest of the things which go to make up two thirds at least of human beauty.’

She took the miniature in silence.

‘She is not like you,’ said I.

‘Not in the least,’ she exclaimed. ‘I am little; she is very tall. She has a commanding manner, a rich voice, and indeed,’ she added with a smile, and then looking down, ‘anyone might suppose her of noble blood.’

I should have liked to tell her how very much sweeter and prettier she was than her sister, what a very different sort of heart, as it seemed to me, from her ladyship’s, looked out at you from her violet eyes; how very much more good, pure, gentle, sympathetic, womanly was the expression of her

mouth compared with what I had found in the portrait's. But our friendship was rather too new just then for such candour as this; yet I would not swear that some faint suspicion did not cross her of what was in my mind, though so subtle are women's ways, so indeterminable by words the meaning that may be perfectly emphatic to every instinct in one in the turn of the head, a droop of the lid, a sudden soft tincturing of the cheek, that I have no reason to offer for supposing this.

She took the miniature to her cabin, and I waited awhile, thinking she would return. I then lighted a cigar, but as I stepped towards the companion with the design of killing the rest of the afternoon till the dinner-hour on deck, Muffin came down the steps. He looked hideously sallow, and carried a horribly dismal expression of countenance, but he appeared to be no longer in liquor.

‘Well,’ said I shortly, ‘how are you now, Muffin?’

‘Uncommonly queer, I am sorrowful to say, sir,’ he answered, patting his stomach and falling away on his left leg with a humbly respectful downcast look and a writhe of the lips into a smile that would have been expressionless if it was not that it increased his ugliness by the exhibition of a row of fangs of the colour of the

keys of an ancient harpsichord. 'The sea is not a congenial *spear*, sir.'

'Sphere, I suppose you mean,' said I; 'but give yourself a day or two, man; the sickness will wear off.'

'I *beg* your pardon, sir,'—he paused, still keeping his eyes downward whilst he bowed meekly and respectfully, but with an air of profound dejection.

'Well?' I exclaimed, running my gaze over the fellow's odd figure with a yearning to laugh in me at the sight of the gouty bulgings of his feet over his pumps.

'*May* I take it, sir,' said he, clasping his hands humbly upon his waistcoat, 'that there is no disposition on the Bayronet's part to give up chasing of her ladyship by water?'

'You *may*,' said I, bluntly. 'Why, confound it, Muffin, we've only just entered on the run!'

He turned up his eyes to heaven till nothing showed but the bloodshot whites: 'Sir, I humbly beg your pardon. It seems an ordacious liberty for the likes of me to be questioning the likes of you; but *may* I ask, sir,—*is* the voyage likely to carry us fur?'

'Well, it is about six thousand miles to the Cape, to begin with,' said I.

'Good God!' he cried, startled out of all

respectfulness. 'Why there'll be years of sailing in that distance, sir, begging your pardon for the hexclamation my agitation caused me to make, sir.'

'If you want to return,' said I, feeling a sort of pity for the poor devil, for the consternation that worked in him lay very strong upon his yellow face, 'your plan must be to obtain Sir Wilfrid's permission to tranship yourself into the first vessel we speak that will be willing to receive you and carry you to England. It is the only remedy I can suggest.'

He bowed very meekly and with a manner of respectful gratitude ; nevertheless, something in him seemed to tell me that he was not very much obliged by my suggestion, and that if he quitted Wilfrid's service it would not be in the manner I recommended.

Nothing worth noting happened till next day. It was in the afternoon. The Scillies were astern and the broad Atlantic was now stretching fair under our bows. A strong fine wind had bowled us steadily down Channel and the utmost had been made of it by Captain Finn, who, despite his talk of studdingsails and stowed anchors, had sent his booms aloft ere we had brought Prawle Point abeam and the 'Bride' had swept along before the strong wind that would come in slaps at times

with almost the spite of a bit of a hurricane in them, under a foretopmast studdingsail; whence you will gather that the yacht was prodigiously crowded; but then Finn was always under the influence of the fear of Wilfrid's head in the companion hatch; for I learnt that several times in the night my cousin unexpectedly made his appearance on deck, and his hot incessant command to both Finn and old Jacob Crimp, according as he found one or the other in charge, was that they were to sail the yacht at all hazards short of springing her lower masts, for in the matter of spare booms and suits of canvas she could not have been more liberally equipped had her errand signified a three years' fighting voyage.

Well, as I have said, it was the afternoon of the third day of our leaving Southampton. The breeze had slackened much about the time that Finn stood ogling the sun through his sextant, and then it veered in a small puff and came on to blow a gentle, steady wind from south-south-east, which tautened our sheets for us and brought the square yards fore and aft. There was a long broad-browed swell from the southward that flashed under the hazy sunlight like splintered glass with the wrinkling of it, over which the yacht went rolling and bowing in a rhythm as stately and regular as the swing of a thousand-ton



Indiaman, with a sulky lift of foam to her cut-water at every plunge and a yeasty seething spreading on either quarter, the recoiling wash of it from the counter as snappish as surf. Suddenly from high above, cleaving the vaporous yellow of the atmosphere in a dead sort of way, came a cry from the look-out man on the topgallant yard, 'Sail ho !' and the sparkle of the telescope in his hands as he levelled the glittering tube at the sea, over the starboard bow, rendered the customary echo of 'Where away?' unnecessary.

There was nothing however to take notice of in this ; the cry of 'Sail ho !' had been sounding pretty regularly on and off since the look-out aloft had been established, as you will suppose when you think of the crowded waters we were then navigating ; though everything thus signalled so far had hove into view broad on either bow or on either beam. We were all on deck ; that is to say, Miss Jennings, snug in a fur cloak,—for the shift of wind had not softened the temperature of the atmosphere,—in a chair near the skylight ; Wilfrid near her, lying upon the ivory-white plank smoking a cigar, with his head supported on his elbow, and I stumping the deck close to them, with Finn abreast of the wheel to windward. We were in the midst of some common-place chatter when that voice from aloft

smote our ears, and when we saw the direction in which the fellow was holding his glass levelled we all looked that way, scarce thinking for the moment that if the stranger were heading for us she would not be in sight from the deck for a spell yet, and as long again if she were travelling our course.

Miss Jennings resumed her seat; Wilfrid stretched his length along the deck as before; and I went on pacing to and fro close beside them.

‘It will be a Monday on which we sight the “Shark,”’ said Wilfrid.

‘How do you know?’ said I.

‘I dreamt it,’ he answered.

Miss Jennings looked at him wistfully as if she believed in dreams.

‘It was an odd vision,’ he continued, with a soft far-away expression in his eyes, very unlike the usual trouble in them. ‘I dreamt that on hearing of the—of the——’ he pushed his hair from his forehead and spoke with his hand to his brow—‘I say that I dreamt I flung myself on horseback—it was a favourite mare—Lady Henrietta, Laura’—she bowed her head—‘and gave chase. I did not know which way to go, so I let fall the reins on the animal’s neck and left the scent to the detection of her instincts. She carried me to the

sea-coast, a desolate bit of a bay, I remember, with the air full of the moaning of vexed waters and a melancholy crying of wind in the crevices and chasms of the cliff, and the whole scene made gaunter than it needed to have been, as I fancied, by a skeleton that was one moment that of a big fish and the next of a man, fluctuating upon the sight like an image seen three fathoms deep floating in such glass-clear water as you get in the West Indian latitudes.' He paused. 'Where was I?' he inquired, with an air of bewilderment.

'Your horse had carried you to the sea-shore,' said Miss Laura, with her face full of credulity. I love a superstitious girl, and who is the woman that does not believe in dreams?

'Ha!' he cried, after a brief effort of memory; 'yes, the mare came to a stand on the margin of the beach, and heaven knows whence the apparition rose: but there was an empty boat tossing before me, with a sort of sign-post erected in her, a pole with a black board upon it on which was written, in letters that glowed as though wrought by a brush dipped in a sunbeam, the single word MONDAY!'

'Pooh!' said I, scornfully, and fancying at the moment that something stirred in the companion-way, I moved a step or two in that direction and saw Muffin with his head a trifle above

the level of the top step apparently taking the air, though no doubt he was diverting himself too, by listening to our talk. On seeing me he descended, stepping backwards with a sickly respectful smile of apology.

‘Why do you say pooh, Mr. Monson?’ asked Miss Jennings. ‘Wise people never ridicule dreams until they have been disproved.’

I admired her arch air that floated like a veil of gauze over her sympathy with Wilfrid.

‘I don’t want to believe in dreams,’ said I; ‘my own dreams are much too uncomfortable to make me desire faith in that direction.’

I glanced at Wilfrid; his eyes were staring right up at the vane at the maintopmast-head, and it was easily seen that he was no longer thinking of what we had been talking about. Miss Jennings opened the novel that lay in her lap and seemed to read; there was a store of this sort of literature in the yacht, laid in, I dare say, by Sir Wilfrid for Lady Monson, who, I don’t doubt, was a great devourer of novels; the trash in one, two, and three volumes of an age of trashy fiction, of a romantic literature of gorgeous waistcoats, nankeen breeches, and Pelham cravats. I don’t think Miss Jennings had read much of the book she held. It was called ‘The Peeress,’ and I believe it had taken her two days to arrive at

the end of the first chapter. But then, who can read at sea? For my part I can never fix my attention. In a dead calm I am prone to snooze; in a brisk breeze every sweep of surge, every leap of frothing head, every glance of sunshine, every solemn soaring of white cloud up the slope of the liquid girdle is an irresistible appeal to me to quit my author for teachers full of hints worth remembering; and then, indeed, I yield myself to that luxury of passivity Wordsworth rhymes about—that disposition to keep quiet until I am visited with impulses—the happiest apology ever attempted by a home-keeping poet for an unwillingness to be at the trouble to seek beyond his hillside for ideas.

‘Here is a flowery fancy!’ exclaimed Miss Jennings, and she began to read. It was something—I forget what—in the primitive Bulwerian vein; plenty of capitals, I dare say, and without much sense that I could make out to linger upon the ear; but one sentence I remember: ‘He had that inexpressible air of distinction which comes as a royal gift from heaven to members of old families and only to them.’

‘Stupid ass!’ exclaimed Wilfrid, whom I had imagined to be wool-gathering.

‘But there is truth in it, though,’ said Miss Jennings.

‘What is an old family?’ I exclaimed.

‘Why a good family, surely, Mr. Monson,’ she answered.

‘No, no, Laura,’ grumbled Wilfrid. ‘I could introduce you to a longshore sailor who can’t sign his name, and whose sole theory of principle lies in successfully hoodwinking the revenue people, who will tell you that his forefathers have been boatmen and smugglers for over three hundred years, and who could feel his way back along a chain of Jims, Dicks, and Joes without a link missing down, maybe, to a time when the progenitors of scores of our Dukes, Earls, and the rest of them were—tush! That boatman belongs to an old family.’

‘Then, pray, what is a good family?’ inquired Miss Jennings.

‘Yonder’s the sail that was sighted awhile gone, Sir Wilfrid,’ sung out Captain Finn in his leather-lunged voice.

My cousin sprang to his feet, and the three of us went to the rail to look.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## WE SPEAK THE 'WANDERER.'

ON the lee-bow was a dash of orange light, much less like the sails of a ship than a feather of vapour bronzed by a sunset and vanishing in the tail of a cloud.

'How does she head, Finn?' cried Wilfrid to the skipper, who was viewing her through a long, heavy, powerful glass of his own.

'Coming dead on end for us, sir.'

'What'll she be, captain?' said I.

He eyed her a bit, and answered, 'A square rig, sir; a bit of a barque, I dare say.'

My cousin suddenly slapped his leg—one of his favourite gestures when a fit of excitement seized him. 'Charles,' he bawled, 'we'll speak her. D'ye hear me, Finn? We'll speak her, I say!'

'Ay, ay, sir,' cried the captain.

'She may have news for us,' Wilfrid proceeded; 'it is about time we fell in with something that has sighted the "Shark."'

'A bit betimes, sir,' said Finn, touching his cap and approaching to give me his telescope which I had extended my hand for.

'Confound it, man!' cried Wilfrid, in a passion, 'everything's always too soon with you. Suppose by this time to-morrow we should have the schooner in sight—what then, hey? What would be your arguments? That she had no business to heave in sight *yet*?'

Finn made no answer, but pulled his cap off to scratch his head, with his lips muttering unconsciously to himself to the energy of his secret thoughts, and his long face, which his mouth seemed to sit exactly in the middle of, working in every muscle with protest.

The distant vessel was showing in the glass as high as the curve of her fore-course, with now and again a dim sort of refractive glimmer of wet black hull rising off a head of sea into an airy, pale length of light that hung in a low gleam betwixt the junction of sea and sky. The sun was westering though still high, but his orb was rayless, and the body of him looked no more than an oozing of shapeless yellow flame into the odd sky that seemed a misty blue in places, though where it appeared so you would notice a faint outline of cloud; and as he waned, his reflection in the wind-wrinkled heave of the long head-

swell, seemed as if each broad soft brow was alive with runnings of flaming oil.

There was to be no more argument about good and bad families. Wilfrid now could think of nothing but the approaching vessel, and the child-like qualities which went to the creation of his baffling, unfixable nature showed in an eager impatience, in which you seemed to witness as much of boyish desire for something fresh and new to happen as of anything else. For my part, I detest arguments. They force you to give reasons and to enter upon definitions. I fancied, however, I was beginning to detect Miss Laura's little weakness. There was a feminine hankering in her after ancient blood, sounding titles, high and mighty things. As I glanced at her sweet face I felt in the humour to lecture her. What but this weakness had led to her sister's undoing? Wilfrid was a worthy, honest, good-hearted, generous-souled creature, spite of his being a bit mad: but I could not imagine he was a man to fall in love with; and in this queer chase we had entered upon there was justification enough of *that* notion. His wife had married him, I suppose, for position, which she had allowed the first good-looking rogue she met to persuade her was as worthless as dust and ashes unless a human heart beat inside it. And the scoundrel was

right, though he deserved the halter for his practical illustration of his meaning. I met Miss Jennings' eye and she smiled. She called softly to me :

' You are puzzling over the difference between a good and an old family ! '

' I wish my countenance were less ingenuous,' said I.

' Hadn't you better run up some signal,' exclaimed Wilfrid, turning upon Finn, ' to make yonder craft know that we want her to stop ? '

' Lay aft here a couple of hands,' shouted Finn in a sulky note.

Two seamen instantly came along. The flag-locker was dragged from its cleats or chocks under the small, milk-white grating abaft the wheel ; Finn, with a square, carrot-coloured thumb ploughed into the book of directions ; then, after a little, a string of butterfly bunting soared gracefully to the topmost head, where the flags were to be best seen, a long pennant topping the gay colours like a tongue of flame against the rusty yellow of the atmosphere ; the dip of the yacht to the swell became a holiday curtsey, and you thought of her as putting on a simper like some pretty country wench newly pranked out by her sweetheart with a knot of ribbons.

‘Aft and haul up the main-tack ; round in on the weather fore braces and lay the topsail to the mast ; down hellum ! so—leave her at that !’ and the ‘Bride,’ with the wide ocean heave lifting to the bow, came to a stand, her way arrested, the wind combing her fore and aft canvas like the countless invisible fingers of giant spirits, and a dull plash and sulky wash of water alongside, and a frequent sharp clatter of wheel chains to the jar of the churning rudder. There was the true spirit of the deep in this picture then, for the seamen had dropped the various jobs they were upon and stood awaiting orders about the decks, every man’s shadow swaying upon the salt sparkling of the spotless planks, and all eyes directed at the approaching craft that had now risen to her wash streak and was coming along in a slow stately roll with her canvas yearning from flying jib to fore royal, every cloth yellow as satin, and flashes of light like the explosion of ordnance breaking in soft sulphur-coloured flames from her wet side as she lifted it sunwards from the pale blue brine that melted yeastily from her metallised forefoot into two salival lines which united abaft and went astern in a wake that looked as if she were towing some half mile length of amber-tinctured satin. Yet there was no beauty in her as in *us* ; it was the sweetness and grace of airy distance working in

her and the mild and misty gushing of the afternoon radiance, and the wild enfolding arms of the horizon sweeping as it were the very soul of the mighty ocean loneliness into her solitary shape and into her bland and starlike canvas, until you found her veritably spiritualised out of her commonplace meaning into a mere fairy fancy, some toylike imagination of the deep; but she hardened rapidly into the familiar prosaics of timber, sailcloth and tackling, as she came floating down upon us, sinking to her narrow white band, then poised till a broad width of her green sheathing was exposed, with a figure in a tall chimney-pot hat standing on the rail holding on by a backstay.

She was a slow old waggon, and one saw the reason of it as she came sliding along, rolling like an anchored galliot in a sea-way, in her bows as round as an apple and her kettle-bottom run; and Wilfrid's impatience grew into torture to us to see almost as much as to him to feel as he'd pace the deck for a minute or two tumultuously, then fling against the rail with a wild stare at the approaching craft as if indeed he was cocksure she was full of news for him, though for my part it seemed mere trifling with the yacht's routine to back her yard that we might ask questions at the early time of day. She steered so as to com



within easy hail and then boom-ending her fore-topmast studdingsail she backed her main topsail and floated the full length of her out abreast of us within pistol shot, pitching clumsily and bringing her bows out of it with the white brine frothing like lacework all about her there, her line of bulwarks dotted with heads watching us, the sounds of the creaking of her aloft very clear along with a farmyard noise of several cocks crowing one after the other lustily, and the lowing of bulls or cows.

‘Barque ahoy!’ sung out Captain Finn, funnelling his hands as a vehicle for his voice.

‘Halloa?’ cried the figure that stood upon the rail in the most cheery, laughing voice that can be conceived.

‘What ship is that?’

‘The “Wanderer.”’

‘Where are you from? and where are you bound to?’

‘From Valparaiso to Sunderland,’ answered the other in a way that made one think he spoke with difficulty through suppressed mirth.

‘Will you tell us,’ bawled Finn, ‘if you’ve sighted an outward bound fore and aft schooner-yacht within the past week?’

‘Sighted a fore and aft schooner-yacht? ay, that I have, master, fine a vessel as yourn pretty

nigh,' shouted the other as though he must burst in a moment into a roar of laughter.

'Ask him aboard! ask him aboard!' cried Wilfrid wild with excitement, slapping his knee till it was like a discharge of pistols. 'Beg him to do me the favour of drinking a bottle of champagne with me; ask him—ask him—but first ascertain if he has made an entry of the meeting in his log-book.'

'Ay, ay, sir. Ho the barque ahoy!'

'Halloa?'

'Can you tell us when and whereabouts ye fell in with that there schooner?'

'Tell ye! to be sure I can; got it in black and white, master. Ha! ha! ha!'

and here the old figure in the tall hat clapped his hand to his side and laughed outright, toppling and reeling about on the rail in such a manner that I took it for granted he was drunk and expected every moment to see him plunge overboard.

'Ask him aboard! ask him aboard!' shrieked Wilfrid. 'Request him to bring his log-book with him. We will send a boat.'

Finn hailed the barque again. 'Sir Wilfrid Monson's compliments to you, sir, and will be pleased to see you aboard to drink a bottle of champagne with him. Will you kindly bring your log-book with you? We will send a boat.'

‘Right y’are,’ shouted the old chap with a humorous flourish of his hand, and so speaking he sprang inboard, laughing heartily, and disappeared down his little companion hatch.

A boat was lowered with four men in charge of surly old Crimp. My cousin’s excitement was a real torment to witness. He smote his hands violently together whilst he urged the men at the top of his voice to bear a hand and be off or the barque would be swinging her topsail and sailing away from us. He twitched from head to foot as though he must fall into convulsions; he bawled to the sailors not to wait to cast anything adrift but to put their knives through it as though somebody were drowning astern and the delay of a single moment might make all the difference between life or death. ‘By heaven!’ he cried, halting in front of me and Miss Jennings with a fierceness of manner that was rendered almost delirious by the quality of savage exultation in it, ‘I *knew* it would fall out thus? They *cannot* escape me. Of course it is the “Shark” that that fellow has sighted.’ He broke from us and ran to the rail and overhung it, gnawing his nails whilst he watched the receding boat with his eyelids quivering and his face working like that of a man in acute pain.

‘I fear,’ said I, in a low voice, to Miss Jennings,

'that it would not require more than two or three incidents of this sort to utterly dement him. His resolution is strong enough. Why in the name of pity will not he secure his mind to it? It's bound to go adrift else, I fear.'

'But realise what he has suffered, Mr. Monson,' she answered gently, 'such a blow might unseat a stronger reason than his. I cannot wonder at his excitement. Look how I am trembling!' She lifted her little hand which shook as though she had been seized with a chill, but there was tremor enough in her voice to indicate her agitation. 'The mere idea that the "Shark" may be much nearer to us than we imagine—that this chase may very shortly bring her within sight of us——' a strong shiver ran through her. 'Do you believe it is the "Shark" that that old man saw?'

'I shall be better able to judge when he comes aboard,' said I. 'See, our boat is alongside. They must fend her off handsomely, by George, if she is not to be swamped. Heavens! how that old cask wallows!'

In a few moments the little old man in the tall hat came to the gangway and looked over; there was apparently some discussion; I imagined the elderly humourist was going to funk it, for I fancied I saw him wag his head; but on a sudden,

all very nimbly, he dropped into the wide main-chains, whence, watching his opportunity, he toppled into the boat, which immediately shoved off. Wilfrid went to the gangway to receive him. I was a little apprehensive of the effect of my cousin's behaviour—which had something of the contortions and motions of a galvanised body—upon the old sea-dog that was coming, and I say I rather hoped that this captain might be a bit too tipsy to prove a nice observer. I took a view of him as he sat in the stern sheets, the boat sinking and rising from peak to hollow as she burst through the water to the gilded, sparkling sweep of the admirably handled oars, and could have laughed out of mere sympathy with the broad grin that lay upon his jelly, mottled countenance. His face was as round as the full moon, and of the appearance of brawn; his nose was a little fiery pimple; small white whiskers went in a slant in the direction of his nostrils, coming to an end under either eye. His hat was too big for him, and pressed down the top of his ears into the likeness of overhanging flaps under the Quaker-like breadth of brim; his mouth was stretched in a smile all the time he was approaching the yacht, and he burst into a loud laugh as he grasped the man-ropes and bundled agilely up the side of the 'Bride.'

'You are very good to come on board, sir,' cried Wilfrid, bowing with agitation, and speaking as though suffering from a swollen throat with the hurry, anxiety, impatience, which mastered him. 'I thank you for this visit. I see you have your log-book with you. Let me inquire your name?'

'Puncheon, sir. Ha! ha! ha! Toby Puncheon, sir; a rascally queer name, ho! ho! And your honour's a lord, ain't ye? I didn't quite catch the words. He! he! he!' rattled out the old fellow, laughing after almost every other word, and staring at us one after another as he spoke without the least diminution of his prodigious grin.

'No, no; not a lord,' exclaimed Wilfrid; 'but pray step this way, Captain Puncheon. Charles, please accompany us. Captain Finn, I shall want you below.'

He led the road to the companion, calling to the steward, whilst he was yet midway down the steps, to put champagne and glasses upon the table.

Captain Puncheon's grin grew alarmingly wide as he surveyed the glittering cabin. 'My eye!' he cried, after a rumbling laugh full of astonishment, 'them's looking-glasses and *no* mistake! And pickle me blue if ever I see the likes of such



lamps afore on board ship!’ growing grave an instant to utter a low whistle. ‘Why, it’s finer than a theaytre, ain’t it?’ he exclaimed, turning to me, once more grinning from ear to ear, and addressing me as if I was his mate that had come off with him. His glass was filled; he drank to us, and pulled his log-book out of the piece of newspaper in which he had brought it wrapped up.

‘Will you kindly give us,’ said Wilfrid, ‘the date on which you passed the schooner-yacht?’

‘Ay, that I will,’ cried Puncheon, turning back the pages of his log, and then pouncing upon an entry with a forefinger curled by rheumatism into the aspect of a fish-hook as though the piece of writing would run away if he did not keep it squeezed down upon the page. He felt about his coat with his other hand, and then bursting into a laugh exclaimed: ‘Gents, you must read for yourselves. Blow’d if I ain’t gone and forgot my glasses.’

The entry was perfectly shipshape, and written in a round, somewhat trembling old hand. There were the usual records of weather, courses steered, and the like, and under the heading of observations was: ‘Passed large schooner-yacht steering west-south-west. Hoisted our ensign, but she showed no colours.’ The log gave the latitude

and longitude of this encounter as  $16^{\circ}$  West longitude,  $41^{\circ} 30'$  North latitude.

I hurriedly made certain calculations after reading aloud this entry, and addressing Finn said, 'If that vessel be the "Shark" she has managed to hold her own so far.'

'Ay, sir,' answered Finn, peering at my figures, 'but what's been her weather?'

'Are you chasing of her, gents?' whipped out Puncheon, smiling as though he only waited for us to answer to break into a roar of laughter.

'Yes,' cried Wilfrid fiercely, 'and we mean to catch her;' then, controlling himself, 'Captain, will you be so good as to describe the vessel you met?'

'Describe her? 'Course I will,' answered the old chap, and forthwith he gave us a sailorly picture of a yacht apparently of the burthen of the 'Shark,' a fore and aft schooner, a long, low, black, handsome vessel, loftily rigged even for a craft of her kind. She passed within a mile and a half of the 'Wanderer'; it was about eight o'clock in the morning, the sunshine bright, the wind north-east, a pleasant air. I asked Puncheon if he examined her with his glass. 'Examine her through my glass? Ay, that I did,' he answered in his hilarious way. 'I see some figures aboard aft. No lady. No, ne'er a hint of a female

garment. Happen if there was women they was still abed, seeing how young the morn was for females as goes to sea for pleasure. I took notice of a tall gent in a white cap with a naval peak and a white jacket.' That was about as much as he could tell us, and so saying he regaled himself with a hearty laugh. Finn questioned him as one sailor would another on points of the yacht's furniture aloft, but the old fellow could only speak generally of the impression left upon him. Wilfrid's face was flushed with excitement.

'Finn,' he exclaimed, 'what do you think?'

'Why, your honour,' said the man deliberately, 'putting two and two together, and totalling up all sarcumstances of rig, haspect, time and place, I don't doubt that the schooner-yacht Captain Punccheon here fell in with was the "Shark."'

Punccheon rose.

'Empty this bottle,' cried Wilfrid to him. 'By heaven, man, the news you give me does me good, though!'

The old chap filled up, grinning merrily.

'Gents,' he cried, holding the foaming glass aloft and looking at it with one eye closed, 'your errand's an honest one I'm sure, and so here's success to it. The craft I fell in with has got legs, mind ye. Yes, by thunder, ha! ha! ha! she's got legs, gents, and'll require all the catching

I expects your honours have stomachs for. 'Tain't to be done in the inside of a month, he! he! he! and so I tells ye. See her slipping through it under her squaresail! God bless my body and soul, 'twas like the shadow of a cloud running ower the waters. But give yourselves a long course, gents all, and you've got a beauty here as must lay her aboard—in time, ha! ha! ha! Your honours, my respects to you.'

Down went the wine and up he got, pulling his hat to his ears and stepping with a deep sea roll up the companion ladder. We followed him to the gangway.

'Is there nothing more to ask, Charles?' cried Wilfrid.

But Puncheon had given us all that he had to tell, and though I could have wished him to hint at something distinctive in the vessel's hull, such as her figure-head or any other point of the like kind in which the 'Shark' might differ from vessels of her build and appearance, yet there was the strongest possible reason to suppose that the craft he reported was Lord Winterton's schooner with Lady Monson and Colonel Hope-Kennedy on board.

Whilst Captain Puncheon waited for the yacht's boat to haul alongside Sir Wilfrid sent for a box of cigars which he presented to the old

chap. The gift produced such a grin that I saw some of the hands forward turn their backs upon us to conceal their mirth.

‘Do you think, captain,’ exclaimed Wilfrid, once more rendered almost alarmingly convulsive in his movements by the excitement that filled him, ‘that there are men aboard your vessel who took note of more than you did in the yacht’s appearance? If so——’

But Puncheon interrupted him by saying that he was the only man who examined the schooner through a glass, and therefore neither his mate nor any of the seamen who were on deck at the time could possibly have observed her so fully as he.

‘Make haste and return,’ bawled my cousin to the fellows in the boat as they shoved off with the grinning old skipper in the stern sheets. ‘Every moment is precious,’ he muttered, walking briskly in short turns opposite Miss Jennings and me. ‘To think of them sneaking along like the shadow of a cloud, hey!’ he sent a wildly impatient look aloft and brought his foot with a heavy stamp to the deck.

‘It is the “Shark” then?’ whispered Miss Jennings.

‘No doubt of it,’ I answered.

She glanced at me as if she had been wounded and her lips turned pale. Well, thought I, an-

icipation, to be sure, is often the worst part of an affair of this sort, but if the mere hearing of the 'Shark' affects this little sweetheart so violently, how will the sighting of the craft serve her, and the boarding of her, if ever it comes to it? In a few minutes the yacht's boat was returning, whilst you saw the figure of old Puncheon clambering out of his main chains over the bulwarks of the 'Wanderer.' A little later and there were hands tailing on to the falls, the boat rising dripping to the davits, and the foretopsail yard slowly pointing its arm to the wind; then, to the full weight of the breeze sweeping red with the sunset into her hollowed canvas, the 'Bride' leaned down, sullenly shouldering the swell into foam with the first stubborn push of her bows, till gathering way she was once more swinging into the west and south with the gloom of the evening growing into a windy vagueness on her lee-beam, whilst on the weather quarter, black as indigo against the dull western redness, was the figure of the barque rolling with filled maintopsail over the long Atlantic heavings and rapidly diminishing into the fragile beauty of some exquisitely carved toy of ebony wood on the skirts of the rising and falling fan-shaped stretch of seething paleness that marked the limits of the 'Bride's' wake.



Wilfrid, who had been standing at the compass staring with a frown at the card, with his arms folded, whilst the men trimmed sail and started the yacht afresh, marched up to me when that business was over and exclaimed, 'What did you make the average of the "Shark's" daily runs according to Puncheon's reckonings of the place of his meeting her?'

'About a hundred and eighty miles a day,' I answered.

'*We* haven't been doing that though!'

'No: but wait a little,' said I: 'let your "Bride" feel the trade wind humming aloft.'

'Finn,' he bawled. The captain came running to us. 'Fetch the track-chart, Finn. There's light enough yet to see by.'

The man disappeared and very quickly returned with a handy chart of the world which he unrolled and laid on the top of the skylight. We all overhung it, Miss Jennings amongst us. The men forward watched us curiously. Something in the manner of them suggested to the swift glance I sent their way that the perception our voyage was more serious, with a wilder, sterner purpose in it than they had imagined, was beginning to dawn upon them since Puncheon's visit.

'Mark the spot, Finn,' exclaimed Wilfrid in

the dogged voice of a man sullenly and obstinately struggling to master a feeling of exhaustion, 'the exact spot where the barque fell in with the "Shark."'

Finn produced a parallel ruler, a pair of compasses, a pencil and the like, calculated and indicated the spot by a little cross.

'How short the distance she has sailed seems!' exclaimed Miss Jennings.

'Fifteen degrees of latitude, though,' said I; 'these charts are mighty deceptive. A very small pencil-mark will cover a tremendously long course.'

Wilfrid stood motionless with his eyes fixed upon the mark Finn had made. He talked a little to himself, but voicelessly. The captain watched him nervously. My cousin came to himself with a start. 'What will have been the "Shark's" course by magnetic compass, Finn, say from the latitude of the Scillies to the spot where the "Wanderer" met her?'

The captain put his parallel rules on the chart and named the course; what it was I forget,—south-west by south, I believe, or something near it.

'Supposing the wind not to head her, Finn,' continued my cousin, 'would she steer the same course down to the time when the "Wanderer" met her?'

‘No, your honour. There’s no call for Fidler any more than there is for me to go to the westwards of Madeira.’

‘Now, Finn, show me on this chart where, steering the course you are now heading, you will have arrived when you have run nine hundred miles?’

‘How’s her head?’ sung out Finn to the fellow at the wheel. The man answered. ‘You hear it, Sir Wilfrid?’ said Finn. My cousin nodded. The captain put his rules on the chart, adjusting them to the course the ‘Bride’ was then sailing, and the measure of nine hundred miles brought the mark he made to touch the cross that represented the ‘Shark’s’ place. ‘That’s right, I think, Mr. Monson,’ said he, turning a sober face of triumph on me.

‘Quite right,’ I answered, and I spoke no more than the truth, for the poor fellow had made his calculations with laborious anxiety.

Wilfrid clapped his hands together with a shout of laughter that carried his voice to a shriek almost, and without speaking a word he strode to the hatch and went below.

## CHAPTER IX.

## A SQUALL.

ALTHOUGH Finn's calculations showed very well upon the chart, it will not be supposed I could find anything in them upon which to ground that hope of falling in with the 'Shark' which had become a conviction with Wilfrid. The look-out man at our masthead might perhaps, on a clear day, compass a range of some twenty miles, even thirty if it came to a gleam of lofty canvas hovering over a hull a league or two past the slope of waters; but what was a view of this kind to signify in so vast an ocean as we had entered? As I have elsewhere said, the difference of a quarter of a point would in a few hours, supposing a good breeze of wind to be blowing, carry the 'Bride' wide of the wake of the 'Shark' and put the two yachts out of sight fair abreast of one another.

Finn understood this as well as I; but when I fell into a talk with him on the subject that evening—I mean the evening of the day on which

we had spoken the 'Wanderer'—he told me very honestly that the odds indeed were heavy against our heaving the 'Shark' into view, though he was quite sure of outsailing her if the course was to extend to the Cape of Good Hope; but that as there *was* a chance of our picking her up, whether by luck, if I chose to think it so, or by his hitting with accuracy upon the line of direction that Fidler would take, he had made up his mind to regard the thing as going to happen, for his own ease of mind as well as to keep my cousin's expectations lively and trusting.

'A man can but do his best, sir,' he said to me. 'Sir Wilfrid needs a deal of humouring; you can see that, sir. I knew all along, when he first came and told me what had happened and gave me my orders, that the job of keeping him pacified would have to go hand in hand with the business of sailing the 'Bride' and lighting upon the 'Shark,' if so be she's discoverable. My notion is that if you're called upon so to act as to fit an employer's taste and keep his views and wishes gratified, though by no more than maintaining expectation in him, the best thing is to turn to and try to think as far as you can the same way as he do. I don't mind saying, Mr. Monson, that I allow the whole of this here voyage to be as vague as vagueness

can well be ; therefore why worrit over parts of it ? Suppose we overhaul the “ Shark ”—then it’ll be all right ; suppose we *don’t*—then it won’t be for the want of trying.’

This was the substance of Finn’s opinion as he imparted it to me that night. His sincerity touched me ; besides, I saw worry enough in the poor fellow to make me sorry for him. Indeed, I resolved from that hour to back him up, heartily agreeing with him that the adventure was quite too vague to justify anxiety in respect of any one detail of the programme.

The weather was quiet when I went to bed that night. I came below from my long yarn with Finn, leaving a windy smear of moon over our mastheads and a dark sky going down from it to the obscured sea-line, with here and there a pale and vapoury point of star hovering sparsely over a wing of cloud that lay still in the dusk as though what wind there was blew low upon the waters. The wide sea came to the yacht in a dusky throbbing, like folds of gloom rolling with a sort of palpitation in them to the eye ; the foam glanced in places, but there was little weight in the wind, and the pallid spires of the yacht’s canvas floated nearly upright through the dark atmosphere, with a sound of the sob of water coming off her weather bow and the dead plash



of the hidden billow falling without life from her quarter, in a way that made one think there were fellows emptying buckets over the side abreast of the wheel.

Wilfrid had been moody and reserved throughout the dinner and retired early to bed. I sat an hour with Miss Laura, with the mild diversion of a draught-board between us ; but we soon forgot to play in talking. We had been but a few days together, yet I had already made the discovery that I wonderfully enjoyed her company and that I immensely relished a quality of arch naïveté in her conversation which owed something of its effect to the contrast between a sort of coquettish sagacity in many things she said and the nun-like artlessness and virginal sweetness I seemed to find in the gentle girlish regard of her charming eyes. I also observed in myself that the more I saw of her the more her beauty gained upon me. I never remember meeting a woman's face that I would sooner have taken as a frank expression of mind ; there was a softness and delicacy of feature that one instinctively accepted as an illustration of habitual refinement and purity of thought. Her manner, save when aroused, was of engaging gentleness and tenderness, and her smile the most amiable of any I remember. Her position was of great delicacy, and could not have failed to pain-

fully distress one of your self-conscious women. Our adventure, every reference to it, every mention of the 'Shark,' every expression in Wilfrid of grief, shame, temper, was as it were a rude withdrawal of the veil from before her sister's frailty. There was no other lady on board to help her to bear, so to speak, the burthen of the inevitable topic, and yet she never made it appear as though there was pain and shame to her in the subject, outside her grief for Wilfrid, her eagerness that her sister should be recovered, her resentment against the man who had betrayed and dishonoured his friend.

I may fail to convey what I thought of her maidenly acceptance of her share in this strange adventure, but I am certain that nobody but a person of exquisite instincts could have acted, as she did, the delicate and exacting part allotted her by my cousin.

The weather was still very quiet when I bade her good-night. I went to my cabin, and do not suppose I was ten minutes in my bed before I fell asleep. I awoke to a sound of a great roaring all about, accompanied by the cries of men on deck, the sharp flinging down of coils of rope and the thunder of shaking canvas trembling in every fibre of the hull. My bunk was an athwart-ship one, and I had turned-in, to employ the proper

sea parlance, with my head to windward; but now the yacht was lying over on t'other side, and I awoke to find my heels in the air and the weight of my body upon my neck; but the angle of the craft was so sharp that it was not without a prodigious amount of heaving and floundering I managed to get my legs over and to sit upright.

A squall! thought I, feeling for my pillow, which I placed in the port end of my bedstead and once again lay down. A flash of sun-bright lightning glanced through the port-hole as though a gun had been fired into my cabin and the interior glanced out into a noon-tide effulgence for one breathless instant, in which, however, I managed to catch sight of the angle formed by a coat with a stanchion, upon which it hung by a peg. Upon my word, it was as though the yacht was upon her beam ends—such a heel as was not to be realised by one lying in a bunk or even sitting upright in it; then came the darkness like a sea of ink, rolling to the sight in which the reflection of the flash still writhed, followed by a mighty shock of thunder that died away in a hundred rattling peals as though 'twas high mountainous land all around the horizon, honeycombed with caverns and every peak as resonant as a hollow dome.

A sharp squall! thought I, but there was too

much noise for sleep. It was all hands on deck I was pretty sure by the numerous scampering over my head; the harsh voices of the sailors bawling at the ropes would be swept into faint cries by the rush of the wind, and now and again a heavy lumpish sound that put a quiver into every plank, followed by a snarling noise like the hissing of half-a-dozen locomotives blowing off steam, was warrant enough to ears not unused to such sounds that the 'Bride' was taking large doses of water in pretty freely over her rail.

I lay quiet and was presently sensible that the yacht was off the wind; the righting of her was no small comfort; she was manifestly going through it like a comet; the sea was now well aft, and the suggestion of swiftness I found in the mere *feel* of the hull, somehow or other, black as my cabin was and the blacker as it remained for the flash of lightning, was accented by the thunderous rush of each surge outstripping us in the race and hurling its black length along the vessel's side, and the fierce spitting and crackling of the smother of spume that was raised by the vessel's headlong flight and that went raging and racing astern on top of the swelling ebony fold that swept forwards from the opposite direction.

Humph! thought I, if this is a case of 'up

keeleg' with friend Finn he'll have to enter into something shrewder and surer than dead reckoning to find his way back again into the 'Shark's' wake. I had a mind to see what was happening, and after a spell of troublesome groping and clawing, during which I had like to have broke my nose by striking it against the edge of a chest of drawers built into a corner, I succeeded in lighting my lamp, and was presently snug in a pea coat and a sou'-wester which I had been wise enough to include in the slender sea outfit I had purchased for this voyage. The cabin light was always kept burning throughout the night, dimmed by one of the stewards, after we had retired to our berths, but with plenty of flame left to see by, and on emerging the first object I caught sight of was the figure of a man on his knees on the cabin floor in a posture of prayer and apparently in an agony of fright. Nothing was to be heard of him until I had approached close, for the roaring of the wind and the washing and foaming of seas drowned all other noises ; but on stooping to make sure of the fellow, whose hands were clasped over his eyes whilst he held his face upturned as he swayed upon his knees, I could hear him praying with all his might, with an energy indeed that might of itself have accounted for the drops of perspiration that glistened

upon his brow, if it wasn't that his attitude of terror explained the secret of that moisture. It was Muffin. There was something so shameful in the fellow's cowardice that all in an instant I lost my temper and gave him a kick which flung him at his length, face down, upon the deck. He set up a horrible howl.

Oh Lord! oh mercy! we're gone! we're gone! Oh, if I was only on dry ground——'

Here I seized him by the collar. 'Get up, you fool,' I cried. 'Do you know where you are, you idiot? Cease! If you alarm Miss Jennings——' and I hauled him on to his legs, shaking him heartily as I did so.

'Oh, Mr. Monson,' he whined, 'is it you, sir? Tell me we ain't all dead and gone, sir! Oh, this is 'orrible, though! 'orrible! Never no more; never no more for me!'

'Be off to your berth at once,' cried I angrily, though my temper died out of me at the absurd sight of his yellow, working, terrified face, rendered ugly enough to challenge the skill of a Cruikshank by the manner in which, during his devotions, he had streaked his forehead and nose and his cheeks past his eyes with his plaster-like lengths of coal-black hair. He was for speaking, but I grasped him by the shoulder and ran him towards his berth that lay some little distance



forward of mine on the starboard side, and when he had shut himself in I made my way on deck, with a peep aft, as I went up the steps, where all seemed quiet.

The night was still very dark but of a clearer dusk. The moon made a red streak low in the west amongst some ragged clouds that seemed to fall like a short flight of steps, every one edged with blood, to the sea-line, where the muddy crimson drained out, just showing the lurid staining of it now and again when some surge beneath reared an unbroken head to the lustre. The night was made to look amazingly wilder than it was in reality by that western setting jumble of ugly lustre and torn vapour like a flock of giant bats heading from the moon for some ocean solitude of deeper blackness. To windward there was a great lake of indigo-blue in the sky in which a number of trembling stars were floating and vast white puffs of cloud crossing it with the swiftness of scud in a gale; but to leeward it was just a mass of heaped-up gloom, one dye of dusk on top of another in blocks of blackness such as a poet might dream of in picturing the hellish walls and battlements of a beleaguered city of demons; and upon this mass of darkness that looked as substantial as stone to the eye there was a plentiful play and crackle of violet lightning; but no

thunder, at least none that I could hear. It was blowing fresh, but the wind had taken off considerably within the last ten minutes; the 'Bride' was close hauled; there was a strong sea on the bow and she was plunging smartly with at frequent intervals a brisk squall of spray over her head that rattled upon the deck like a fall of hail in a thunderstorm; a dark gleam would break first here and then there from her deck to her rolling, but the water was draining off fast, flashing in a loud hissing through the scupper holes at every lee send, but with weight enough yet remaining in each rush of it to enable me to gather that it must have been pretty nearly waist-high between the bulwarks with the first shipping of the seas and the first downrush of the fierce squall.

They had snugged the 'Bride' to very small canvas; the play of the white waters round her threw out her shape clear as black paint on canvas; at moments she dived till you would think the tall black coil arching at her past the creaming glare crushed out of the sea by the smiting of her forefoot must leap right aboard her; but her staunch and buoyant bow, the truest piece of ocean moulding I ever saw in a ship, would regularly swing with a leap to the peak of the billow, shattering it with a saucy

disdain that seemed to be followed by an echo of derisive laughter in the yelling ring of the wind splitting upon the rigging or sweeping into the iron hard cavities of the diminished spaces of wan and spectral canvas.

I took all this in as I stood a minute in the companion hatch; then perceiving the figure of a man to windward almost abreast of me, I crossed to him. It was Finn.

‘Very ugly squall that, Mr. Monson,’ said he after peering at me to make sure of my identity; ‘it found us with tops’l and t’gallants’l set and took us slap aback. It was the most unexpected thing that ever happened to me; as onnatural as that there moon. Talk of keeping a look-out! I was staring hard that way with the wind a pleasant air blowing off t’other side and saw nothing and heard nothing until I felt it.’

‘You had to run?’

‘Ay, but not for long, sir.’

‘How’s her head now, Captain Finn?’

‘Her proper course, Mr. Monson.’

‘Well, the weather is brightening. You’ll be making sail again on your ship, I suppose, presently?’

‘Ay, but let that muck blow away first,’ he answered, pointing with a shadowy arm into the mass of obscurity where the lightning still winked

fitfully. 'After such a blow-me-aback job as this I ain't going to trust the weather till I can see more of it.'

I lingered a little, watching the slow opening of the sky to windward, and the gradual unfolding of the stars down the velvet declivity, that looked as though purified by the cleansing of the black wet squall, and then bidding good-night to Finn, who seemed a bit subdued by the wildly disconcerting attack of the weather, that to a sober, vigilant seaman was about as uncomfortable a snub in its way as could be administered, I went below, intending to walk straight to my berth and go to bed again. On entering the cabin, however, I found the lamp turned up, and Wilfrid pacing the carpet with long strides and with an agitation of manner that was grotesquely deepened by the occasional stagger of his gait by the plunging of the yacht and the hurried lift of his arm to clutch the nearest thing at hand for support. I concluded that he had been aroused by the commotion of the squall, but thought it strange he had not stepped on deck to see how things were. On seeing me he put his hand on the back of a fixed revolving chair, and swung, or rather reeled, himself into it, then leaned his cheek upon his hand in a posture of extreme moodiness, whilst he kept his eyes bent downwards.

I took a seat opposite him, after a glance round in search of Miss Jennings, who, I thought, might also be up.

‘The noise above disturbed you, I suppose, Wilfrid?’ said I.

‘I have not slept,’ he answered.

‘Not since half-past nine! You went to bed then, you know, and it’s now two o’clock,’ I exclaimed, looking at the dial under the skylight.

‘I have not slept,’ he repeated.

‘I wonder that the squall did not bring you on deck.’

‘For what purpose?’ he exclaimed gloomily. ‘I could hear Finn’s voice; I could follow what the men were doing. If every squall we are likely to meet is to bring me from my bed, I may as well order a hammock to be slung for me on deck.’

‘What is the matter, Wilfrid?’ said I, earnestly and soothingly. ‘Something, I fear, has happened to vex and bother you.’

He passed his hand over his eyes, and looking down said, ‘I have had a warning.’

‘A what?’ I exclaimed.

‘A warning,’ he answered, fetching a deep sigh and making as if to rise, retaining, however, his posture of profound melancholy, whilst he

sent a slow, wandering look around, finally fastening his eyes upon me.

‘From whom came this warning, Wilfrid?’ said I, cheerfully. ‘Muffin? Egad, you’ll be getting a warning from him soon, I reckon. I found the chap on his knees just now, sweating with fear and praying like clockwork. I gave him a kick, and I wonder the howl that he raised did not bring you running out of your cabin.’ I jabbered this off in a reckless, laughing way, though I watched him narrowly, too, all the time I was speaking.

‘Nothing shall hinder me, Charles,’ he exclaimed, closing his right fist and letting it lie in a menacing way upon the table. ‘I have made up my mind to tear the creature who still remains my wife from the side of the man she has left me for; and before God’—he rolled his eyes up and raised his clenched hand—‘my vow is this: that I will hunt them from port to port, through ocean after ocean, until I meet with them! *When* that shall be I know not; but this I *do* know—that my time will come and I can wait. But I must be on the move. Nothing could render life tolerable to me now but the sense of action, the animation and hope of pursuit.’

‘But the warning——?’ said I.

‘Oh, to be vexed by ghostly exhortations—it



is enough to craze one!’ he exclaimed. ‘Heaven knows, resolution grows weak enough in me as it is to any thought of my little one that visits me. Oh no,’ he cried, with a sarcastic shake of the head and a singular smile, ‘do not believe that thoughts of my baby girl would cause me to falter even for one breathless instant on this course that I have made up my mind to pursue. But to think of the helpless lamb as alone——’

‘My dear fellow,’ I interrupted, ‘the child could not possibly be in tenderer hands.’

‘I know, I know,’ he cried, with a sob in his voice, ‘but she is motherless, Charles; and then how precarious is life at that age! I may never see her again!’

He broke down at this and hid his face.

‘Come, come,’ said I, ‘your nerves have been strained by the incident of this afternoon, or, I should say, of yesterday afternoon — unduly, though intelligibly, excited by Puncheon’s report of having passed the “Shark.” Endeavour to get some rest, old fellow. These warnings, these visions, mysterious voices sounding out of heaven knows where, midnight shapes as thin as moonshine—Wilfrid, depend upon it, they all emanate from a disordered condition of that part of the body which the Chinese have most wisely selected

as the true seat of the soul ; I mean here,' said I, patting my waistcoat.

He regarded me somewhat vacantly and sat awhile in silence, sighed tremulously, and stepped to the foot of the companion ladder, where he stood staring up into the arch of black night that filled the companion entrance. Presently Finn rumbled out an order on deck. There was the flash of bright stars upon the gleaming ebony of the cabin windows with every heave of the yacht ; the sea was moderating, and the loud humming of the wind aloft gradually fining into a dull complaining noise. Ropes were thrown down overhead ; voices began to sing out. I uttered a loud yawn. Wilfrid turned and exclaimed, 'Don't let me keep you up, Charles.'

'It's all right,' said I, 'but why not go to bed, too ? Or first describe this warning that you have had ; express the nature of it. Perhaps, like the proverbial onlooker who sees most of the game, I might be able to help you with some reassuring suggestion.'

But he merely shook his head ; and now, feeling quite intolerably sleepy, and in no mood, therefore, as you will suppose, to reason with a mind so oppressed as his with superstitious melancholy, I called a cheery good-night to him, went to my cabin, and was soon fast asleep.

I was awakened by the brilliant daylight that filled my berth, and at once rose and sung out to the steward to prepare me a bath. All the time I bathed and dressed I was thinking of Wilfrid and of what he called his 'warning.' I supposed it was some voice that he had heard, and he had made it plain that it had referred, amongst other things maybe, to his little infant. Now, though of course I had known for years that he was 'touched,' as the expression goes, I had never understood that his craziness had risen to the height of hearing voices and beholding visions in his waking hours; and I was, therefore, forced to believe that his mind was far more unhinged at present than his manners and speech, peculiar as they unquestionably were at times, had indicated. Well, thought I, assuredly if he gets worse, if the symptoms should grow more defined, this chase will have to come to an end. I, for one, should most certainly call a halt. Why, what could be fuller of madness than his vow last night before me—to go on sailing from port to port, and traversing ocean after ocean, until he has captured her ladyship; as if a pursuit on such lines as these were going to end in anything better than driving all hands daft and converting the 'Bride' into a floating lunatic asylum? So far, it is true, I have found method enough to keep my mind

tolerably easy ; but if poor Wilfrid is going to become very much worse, hang me, thought I, plying a pair of hair-brushes with very agitated hands, if Captain Finn don't haul his wind for the handiest port and set me ashore for one.

## CHAPTER X.

## I GO ALOFT.

It was a fresh sweet ocean morning, one of the fairest I remember; the wind, a tender fanning from the west, warm enough to make one fancy an odour and balm of the tropics in it, leagues ahead as those parallels yet lay. The sky was one broad surface of curls and feathers of pearl-coloured vapour, an interweaving, as it were, of many-shaped links of silken cloud shot with silver and amber and gold from the early sun. I never beheld a lovelier dome of sky so tender in glory and rich in delicate perfections of tints. The sea spread in a firm dark line to it like a blue floor under some mighty roof of marble; the sun's wake came in a misty stream of light to the port bends of the yacht, where it was flashed by the mirror-like wet blackness of the glossy side back deep into the brimming azure of the brine in a great puff of radiance that made one think of a cloud of brightly illuminated steam ascending from the depths.

Everything was brilliant and clean and cheerful, the decks of the white softness of foam, brass sparkling, rigging flemish-coiled or festooned as by an artist's hand upon the pins; forward stood the long cannon radiant as polished jet, a detail that gave an odd significance to the saucy knowing 'spring,' as it is called, of the yacht that way. The cocks and hens in the coops were straining their throats and blending with their cheerful voices was a noise of pigs; there was black smoke pouring away from the galley chimney, and now and again you got a whiff of something good frying for the men's breakfasts, for my cousin fed his sailors well. The 'Bride' with erect masts was sliding over the wide folds of water whose undulations were so long drawn and regular as to be scarce perceptible in the motion of the vessel; there was air enough to crisp the sea, and where the sun's light lay the tremble was blinding; on either bow was a curl of silver and pale eddyings alongside with a line of oil-smooth water going away astern from under the counter; yet we were but creeping, too, spite of the yacht being a pile of white cloths—every stitch she owned abroad to her topgallant studdingsail.

The mate had charge and was stumping the weather side of the quarterdeck in his sour way when I arrived.



‘ Good morning, Mr. Crimp.’

‘ Marning,’ he answered.

‘ Ugly squall that last night.’

‘ Ugly? ay.’

The fellow gave the word *sir* to no man, restricting its use when ashore to dogs as Finn once told me; but his surly tricks of speech and manner were so wholly a part of him, so entirely natural, so unconsciously expressed, that it would have been as idle to resent them as to have quarrelled with him for having an askew eye or lost one’s temper because his beard resembled rope yarns.

‘ Anything in sight?’ I asked, looking round.

‘ Ay,’ he answered.

‘ Where?’ I exclaimed, running my eye over the sea.

‘ Up yonder,’ he responded, indicating with a gesture of his chin the topgallant-yard where was perched the inevitable figure of a look-out man.

‘ But where away, Mr. Crimp,—where away, sir?’

‘ On the starboard bow,’ he answered, ‘ ’tain’t long been sighted.’

Breakfast would not be ready for some time yet, and having nothing to do I thought I would make a journey aloft on my own account and take a view of the distant sail and of the spacious field

of the glittering morning ocean from the altitude of the masthead. I stepped below for a telescope of my own, a glass I had many a time ogled the sea with when I was doing penance for past and future sins in African and West Indian waters. Muffin was at the foot of the companion steps holding a pair of Wilfrid's boots. He cast his eyes down and drew his figure in though there was abundance of room for me to pass. A slow, obsequious, apologetic smile went twisting and curling down his lips; his yellow face had a burnished look; he was uncommonly clean-shaven, and his hair was brushed or plastered to the smoothness of his skull.

‘Got your courage back?’ said I.

‘Thank you, yes, sir,’ he answered humbly with his eyes respectfully cast down. ‘Richard’s himself again this morning, sir, as the saying is. But it was a ‘orrible time, sir.’

‘You came near to making it so,’ said I. ‘Have you been to Sir Wilfrid yet?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘How is he?’

‘Asleep, sir,’ he replied in a blandly confidential way.

‘Glad to hear it,’ I exclaimed; ‘don’t disturb him. He passed a bad night down to two or three o’clock this morning.’ I was going; sud-

denly I stopped. 'By the way,' said I, rounding upon the fellow, 'how long have you been in Sir Wilfrid's service?'

My question appeared to penetrate him with a consuming desire to be exact. He partially closed one eye, cocked the other aloft like a hen in the act of drinking, and then said with the air of one happy in the power of speaking with accuracy, 'It'll be five months to the hour, sir, come height o'clock, Friday evening next.'

'During the time that you have been in his service,' said I carelessly, 'have you ever heard him speak of hearing voices or seeing visions?'

'Voices, no, sir,' he answered; 'but wisions,' he added with a sigh and lengthening his yellow face into an expression of deep concern, 'has, I fear, sir, more'n once presented theirselves to him.'

'Of what nature, do you know?'

'Sir Wilfrid's a little mysterious, sir,' he responded in a greasy tone of voice and looking down as if he would have me understand that with all due respect he was my cousin's valet and knew his place.

I said no more but made my way on deck with a suspicion in me that the fellow had lied, though I hardly knew why I should think so. I trudged forward, and finding three or four of the men hanging about the galley I pulled out five

shillings and gave the money to one of them, saying that I was going aloft and wished to pay my footing, for I was in no temper to be chased and worried. This made me free of the rigging, into which I sprang and had soon shinned as high as the topgallant-yard, upon which I perched myself so noiselessly that the man who overhung it on the other side of the mast and who was drowsily chewing upon a quid of tobacco with his eye screwed into Wilfrid's lovely telescope, had no notion I was alongside of him. I coughed softly, for I had known seamen to lose their lives when up aloft by being suddenly startled. He put a whiskered face past the mast and stared at me as if I was Old Nick, out of the minutest pair of eyes I ever saw in the human head, mere gimlet-holes they seemed for the admission of light.

'Thinking of your sweetheart, Jack?' said I with a laugh, ignorant of his name but counting Jack to be a sure word.

'Can't rightly say *what* I was a-thinking of, sir,' he answered hoarsely; 'twarn't my sweetheart anyways, seeing that the only gell I was ever really partial to sarved me as her ledship sarved Sir Wilfrid yonder,' indicating the quarter-deck with a side-ways motion of his head.

'Cut stick, eh?' said I.

'Wuss than that, sir,' he answered. 'If she'd

ha' taken herself off and stopped at that I dunno as I should have any occasion to grumble; but she prigged the furniture that I'd laid in agin getting married. Ay, *prigged* it. The boiling amounted to fourteen pound tew, a bloomin' lot o' money for a poor seafaring man to be robbed of for the sake of a master chimney-sweep.' He cast a slow disgusted look around and expectorated with an air of loathing.

'I hope you got the master chimney-sweep locked up,' said I.

'No fear!' cried he, talking very fast; 'smite me, your honour, if that there gell didn't tarn to and swear that that furniture was hers, bought out of her own savings, and that she guv me the money to order it with. Thinking o' my sweet-heart!' he grumbled, lifting the telescope in an abstracted manner to his eye, 'if it worn't for women dummed if this 'ere earth wouldn't be worth a-living in.'

I smothered a laugh, and catching sight of the sail shining faintly in the blue air, leagues and leagues distant as it seemed, I pointed the glass and easily distinguished the royal, topgallant-sail and a snatch of the topsail of a ship heading directly for us.

'I wonder if she'll have any news?' said I.

'Beg your pardon, sir,' exclaimed the man,

‘but could you tell me how long it’s reckoned in the cabin this here ramble’s a-going to last?’

‘What was the nature of the voyage you signed for?’

‘Why,’ he replied, ‘a yachting cruise to Table Bay and home.’

‘It’ll not exceed that, I believe,’ I exclaimed.

‘And if we picks up that there “Shark” and recovers the lady afore we git to the Cape, shall we keep all on or shift our hellum for Southamptin again?’

‘Captain Finn will be able to tell you more about it than I,’ I responded in a tone that silenced him, though his tiny eyes looked athirst for information as he regarded me aslant over one of his huge whiskers.

The height from which I surveyed the vast plain of sea, the spirit of whose loneliness seemed to find the one touch of emphasis it needed to render its magnitude realisable by human instincts in that remote flaw of ship’s canvas which broke the continuity of the boundless horizon filled me with a feeling of exhilaration I cannot express; the sweet mild ocean breeze high on that slender yard sank through and through me, and vitality to its most secret recesses was quickened by it into a very intoxication of life, new, free, ardent; the air hummed gently in a vibratory metallic



note as though it were some echo of a distant concert of harps and violins ; far down the hull of the yacht, plentiful as was her beam in reality, looked like a long slender plank rounded at the bows, the whiteness of the deck showing with a sort of radiance as though it were thinly sheeted with crystal upon which the shadows of the rigging, masts, and canvas lay dark and beautifully clear, with a fitful swaying of them to the heave of the fabric, off polished and brilliant things such as the skylight or the brass decorations, when flashes of fire would leap forth to be veiled again in the violet gloom of the recurrent shade. The thin curve of foam on either hand the cutwater looked like frosted silver ; my eye went to the airy confines of the ocean spreading out into a delicate haze of soft azure light where it washed the marble of that magnificent morning firmament, and then it was that, sharper than ever I had before felt it, there rose the perception in me of the incalculable odds against our sighting the yacht we were in pursuit of, so measureless did the ocean distance appear when with the gaze going from the 'Bride's' masthead I thought of the distance that made the visible and compassable sphere, big as it was, as little as a star compared with the heavenly desert it floats in.

When I looked down again I observed Miss

Jennings watching me from the gangway with her hand shading her eyes. I raised my hat and she bowed, and being wishful of her company I bade my friend Jack keep his eyes polished, as the piece that was nailed to the mast would help to lessen the loss that his sweetheart had occasioned him, and descended, hearing him rumbling in his gizzard as I got off the foot-rope, though what he said I did not catch.

‘What is there to be seen, Mr. Monson?’ was Miss Jennings’ first question, with a delicate fire of timorous expectation in her eyes.

‘Only a ship,’ said I.

‘Not—not——’

‘No! not the “Shark” yet,’ I exclaimed smiling.

‘I am stupid to feel so nervous. I dare say I am as passionately anxious as Wilfrid to see my sister in this vessel safe—and separated from—from’—she faltered and quickly added, bringing her hands together and locking them, ‘but I dread the moment to arrive when the “Shark” will be reported in sight.’

‘Well, if we *are* to pick up that craft,’ said I, ‘we shall do so and then there’ll be an end on’t. But I give you my word, Miss Jennings, the ocean looks a mighty big place from that bit of a stick up there.’

‘Too big for this chase?’

‘Too big I fear to give Wilfrid the chance he wants.’

She sent a bright glance at the topgallant-yard and said, ‘Does not that great height make you feel dizzy?’

‘Ay, as wine does. There is an intoxication as of ether in the air up there. Oh, Miss Jennings, if I could only manage to get you on to that yard—see how near to heaven it is! You would then be able not only to say that you looked like an angel, but that you felt like one.’

She laughed prettily and turned as if to invite me to walk. After a bit I spoke of the squall last night. It had not disturbed her. Then I told her of Wilfrid’s melancholy perturbation, on which her face grew grave and her air thoughtful.

‘He did not tell you the nature of the warning?’ she inquired.

‘No. It evidently had reference to his baby. I wished to ascertain whether it was a voice or a vision—though I really don’t know *why*; for an hallucination is an hallucination all the world over, and it signifies little whether it be a sheeted essence to affect the eye or a string of airy syllables to affright the ear.’

‘I am sorry, I am sorry,’ she exclaimed

anxiously; 'it is a bad symptom, I fear. Yet it ought not to surprise one. The shock was terrible—so recent too! Scarcely a fortnight ago he felt safe and happy in his wife's love and faith——'

'Maybe,' I interrupted, 'but I wouldn't be too sure though. When I last met him—I mean some while before he came to ask me to join him in this trip—his manner was very clouded, I thought, when he spoke of his wife. I fancy even then suspicion was something more than a seed. But still, as you say, it is all desperately recent, and it certainly is a sort of business to play havoc with such a mind as his. Did you ever hear of his having warnings or seeing visions before?'

'Never.'

'I asked his valet that question just now, and he told me he did not know that his master heard "voices," but he believed he was troubled with "visions," as he called them.'

'Wilfrid has been very secret then. My sister spoke much to me of the oddness of his character, made more of it indeed than ever I could witness,—but then one understands why, now,' she exclaimed with an angry toss of her head. 'But she never once hinted at his suffering from delusions of the kind you name. How

should his man know then? Wilfrid is not a person to be so very confidential as all that with his servant. I never liked Muffin, and I believe he is a story-teller.'

'So do I,' said I, 'and a coward to boot,' and I told her of my finding him on his knees, and how I had prostrated him with a kick. This provoked one of her cordial, sweet, *clearing* laughs. It was a music to fit to gayer thoughts than we had been discoursing, and presently we were chatting lightly about dress, society, some maestro's new opera and other light topics very much more suitable for a yacht's quarter-deck under such a morning heaven as was then shining upon us, than the raven, owl, and bat-like subjects of ghosts, warnings, visions, and insanity.

The breakfast bell rang; Muffin arrived with a soap-varnished face and a humble bow, and in greasy accents delivered his master's compliments to us and, please, we were not to wait breakfast for him. But when we were half through the meal Wilfrid came from his cabin and seated himself. He looked worn and worried; his expression was that of a man who has succeeded in calming himself after a secret bitter mental conflict, but whose countenance still wears the traces of his struggle. He called for a cup of tea, which with a slice of dry toast formed his breakfast.

Now and again I saw him glancing wistfully at Miss Jennings, but his eyes fell from her when she looked at him as though he feared the detection of some wish or thought in the manner of his watching her. He inquired languidly about the weather, the sail the yacht was under, and the like.

‘There’ll be a ship in sight over the bow,’ said I, ‘by the time we are ready to go on deck.’

‘Ha!’ he exclaimed, instantly briskening; ‘we must speak her. Were it to come to twenty vessels a day passing us we should hail them all. But it is the wind’s capriciousness that makes the fretting part of an excursion of this kind. Here are we creeping along as though in tow of one of our boats, whilst where the “Shark” is there may be half a gale driving her through it as fast as a whale’s first rush to the stab of a harpoon.’

‘Heels were given to us in the small hours of this morning though,’ said I. ‘We covered more space of sea in five minutes than I should like to swim if I had a month to do it in.’

‘Oh, but she was off her course,’ exclaimed Wilfrid.

‘Only to the first of the squall,’ I exclaimed; ‘when I went on deck she was lying fair up again and crushing through it with the obstinacy of a liner.’



He glanced at me absently as though he barely attended to my words, and then looked round him, as I supposed, to observe if Muffin and the stewards were out of hearing. He lay back in his chair, eyeing Miss Jennings for a little with a thoughtful regard that was made pathetic by the marks of care and grief in his face.

‘Laura,’ he said, ‘I am worrying about baby.’

‘Why, Wilfrid?’ she answered gently.

‘Oh, it may be a mere instinctive anxiety, some secret misgiving, well founded but quite inexplicable and therefore to be sneered at by friend Charles here—who knows not yet the subtleties of a flesh-and-blood tie—as mere sentiment.’

‘But why allow a fancy to worry you, Wilfrid?’ said I.

‘I fear it is no fancy,’ he answered quickly.

‘I told Miss Jennings,’ said I, ‘that you have been vexed and upset by what you interpreted into a warning.’

‘Did it particularly refer to baby?’ she asked.

‘Wholly,’ he responded gloomily.

‘But confound it all, Wilfrid,’ cried I somewhat impatiently, ‘won’t you put this miserable vision into words? What form did it take? A warning! If you choose to view things askew they’re full of warnings. Consider the supersti-

tions which flourish ; the signs of luck and of ill-luck ; the meaning of the stumble on the threshold, the capsized salt-cellar and the rest of the inventions of the wicked old hags who ride a cock-horse on broomsticks. Why,' I cried, talking vehemently with the idea of breaking through the thickness upon his mind, though it was no better than elbowing a fog, 'I protest, Wilfrid, I would rather swing at your lower-yardarm and be cut down after a reasonable time to plumb the deep peace of the green silence beneath our keel, than live in a torment of apprehension of shadows, and convert life into a huge mustard poultice to adjust to my quivering anatomy staggering onwards to the grave !'

He surveyed me with a lack-lustre eye whilst he listened.

'Might not this warning, as you call it, Wilfrid,' said Miss Jennings, 'have been some brief, vivid dream, the impression of which was keen enough, when you awoke, to make you imagine you had viewed what had appeared with open eyes?'

'No !' he answered emphatically, 'what I saw I saw as I see you.'

'Then it wasn't a voice?' I exclaimed.

'No matter,' he said, 'God's eye is upon the innocent. Surely he will protect my little one.'

Still—still—' he seemed to struggle with some thought and paused.

I made up my mind to attempt a bold stroke. 'Wilf,' said I, 'your child must be dearer to you than your wife. Since you are uneasy about the bairn why not abandon a pursuit which, I give you my word, seems to me about as aimless as a chase after the flying shadow of a cloud, and shift your helm for home, where you will be able to have the child by your side and where there will be no need for warnings relating to her to worry you?'

A dangerous light came into his eyes; his strangely cut nostrils enlarged and trembled; half a dozen dark moods went like ripples of shadow over his face. I regarded him steadfastly, but I will own not without a good deal of anxiety, for his bearing at this moment had more of the madman in it than I had ever before witnessed. He breathed deep several times before speaking.

'You are right,' he said; 'my child is dearer to me than my wife, but my honour stands first of all. For God's sake do not craze me with such suggestions. Look at me!' he cried, extending his arms, 'gripped here,' clasp ing his left hand, 'by my child that in its sweet innocence would withhold me from this pursuit; and dragged here,' and here he clenched his right hand with a

menacing shake of it, 'by a sense of duty that *must* have its way though it should come to my never setting eyes on my baby again. Charles'—his voice sank—'at *your* hands I should have expected something better than such advice as this. If you are weary of the voyage——'

'No, no,' I interrupted.

'Why torment me then,' he shouted, 'by representing this pursuit as idle as a chase of shadows? Is it so? Great heaven, man! you yourself read out the entry in Captain Punccheon's log-book.'

'Well, well, Wilfrid,' said I soothingly, 'I am very sorry to have said anything to annoy you. The fact is I am too prosaic in my views of things to be as helpful as I should like to be in a quest of this sort. Come, shall we go on deck now and see if that chap which I sighted from the top-gallantyard has hove into view yet?'

The poor fellow rose slowly from his chair, straightening up his figure till he looked twice as tall again as he was. His anger had left him.

'Oh for the privilege,' he exclaimed, 'of being able to catch but a single glimpse of the future! Would to heaven I had been born a saint with a glory round my head, for by that light only is it possible to interpret the hieroglyphs in which the page of life is printed.'

‘Miss Jennings,’ said I, ‘your sunny hair comes so near to the sort of nimbus my cousin desires, that I am sure if you would cast your eyes upon the mystical page that puzzles him you could read it aloud to us both by the light of those golden tresses.’

‘Charles,’ exclaimed Wilfrid shortly, ‘you are for making fun of everything,’ and he stalked to his cabin, but only to fetch his pipe, as I afterwards found.

I could not discover, however, that Miss Jennings wholly agreed in Wilfrid’s notion of my ridiculing propensity.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE PORTUGUESE BRIG.

RIGHT over the bows on either hand the sky had cleared since the early morning ; the fairy drapery of linked, prismatic, shell-like cloud had lifted, leaving the sea-line a dark blue sweep of water against the delicate effulgence of the heavens, and like a star climbing above that most exquisite horizon shone the sail that was approaching us, still distant a fair eight miles, but already distinctly visible from the low altitude of the 'Bride's' quarter-deck. Sir Wilfrid, leaning over the side, sent a long yearning look at her, then with a glance at the man on the topgallant-yard he walked over to Finn, who had relieved the mate at eight bells, and conversed with him. I got a chair for Miss Jennings, fetched her novel—the end of the first volume of which seemed still as far off as the Cape of Good Hope—and a rug for her feet, and having made her comfortable I loaded a pipe and squatted myself on deck under the lee of the mainmast.



I was not perhaps in the very sweetest of tempers ; for though what I had said below might have been a bit provoking, Wilfrid had turned upon me for it a little too hotly methought. This expedition, to be sure, had a special interest for *him*, as it had a special interest for Miss Jennings ; but so far as *I* was concerned it was a mere sympathetic undertaking. My cousin, to be sure, was ‘wanting’ ; but that consideration was not going to render any indignation I might unwarily provoke in him the more endurable. My quarrel, however, just then lay with myself. I was beginning to consider that I had joined Wilfrid in this cruise too hurriedly ; that had I insisted upon more time for reflection I should have declined the adventure for the very good reason that I was unable to see how I could be of the least use to him in it. The ocean makes people selfish ; its monotony presses upon and contracts the mind as its visible girdle circumscribes the sight. Thought is forced inwards and the intellect devours itself as the monkey eats its tail. I was already pining somewhat for the diversions of the shore. Had I been sensible of any limit to the daily and nightly routine of eating, sleeping, keeping a look-out and discussing probabilities, my humour might have lightened somewhat ; but on what date was this voyage to end ? Where was this

white fabric that was floating in beauty over the quiet waters going to carry me? Heavy clouds of smoke floated from my lips when I thought that for months and months I might be sundered from my club, from the opera, of which I was a very great lover, from the engaging recreation of billiards, from the quarter of a hundred of pleasures with which the idle man of means loads the blunderbuss of life to shoot at and kill the flying hours as they pass.

Poor Wilfrid, though! I thought with a sigh; and an emotion of pity rose in me as a rebuke when I glanced at his long, awkward figure, thought of the bitter heart-ache that left him only when he slept, of his love for his little one, of the dreadful grief and dishonour that had come to him, of this apparently aimless pursuit upon the boundless surface of the ocean of a faithless woman, with the subtle distressing quality of madness in all he did, in all he thought, to make his conduct a sadder thing than can be described.

I peeped round the mast for a short view of Miss Jennings. She seemed to have lighted on a chapter in the novel that was interesting. Under the droop of her long lashes her half-closed violet eyes showed with a drowsy gleam; her profile had the delicacy of a cameo, clear and tender, against the soft grey of the bulwarks past her.

Deuced odd, thought I, that I should find her prettiness so fascinating ; as though, forsooth, she was the first sweet girl I had ever seen ! I filled another pipe and sat awhile puffing slowly, with these lines of haunting beauty running in my head :

Have you seen but a bright lily grow,  
Before rude hands have touched it ?  
Have you marked but the fall of the snow  
Before the soil hath smutch'd it ?  
Have you felt the wool of the beaver ?  
Or swan's down ever ?  
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the briar ?  
Or the nard in the fire ?  
Or have tasted the bag of the bee ?  
O so white ! O so soft ! O so sweet is she !

The poet is also the prophet ; and maybe, thought I, when old Ben Jonson planned this fairy temple of words, he had his eye on some such another little delicate goddess as that yonder.

But there was to happen presently something of a kind to send sentiment flying.

Bit by bit the cloud-mailed sky had drawn away down into the northward, until far past our mastheads that way it was clear blue heaven with an horizon ruling it of a sort of transparent sharpness that made you imagine you saw the atmosphere beyond through it as though it were the edge of some huge lens. The breeze was weak and the yacht's pace very leisurely ; there

were hints of a calm at hand, here and there in certain long glassy swathes which wound like currents amongst the darker shadow of the wrinkling breeze upon the water; to every small roll upon the long sleepy undulation, the main boom swang in with a short rattle of canvas in the head of the sail and a flap or two forwards with the smite of the mast by the square topsail as though there were hands aloft lazily beating a carpet.

The vessel ahead was steering dead for us, her masts in one. She was much smaller than I had supposed from the first glimpse I caught of her from the masthead—a little brig, apparently, her cloths showing out rusty to the brilliance as she neared us, albeit afar they had shone like a star of white fire. Her hull was of a dirty yellow—a sort of pea-soup colour, and the foot of her fore-sail was spread by a bentinck boom. She was without an atom of interest in my eyes—a small foreigner, as I supposed, sluggishly lumbering home to some Spanish or Italian port with her fore-castle filled with chocolate-coloured Dagos and the cabin atmosphere poisonous with the lingering fumes of bad cooking.

Wilfrid and Finn stood looking at her together, the latter raising a glass to his eye from time to time. I knocked the ashes out of my bowl and crossed over to them.

‘It will be strange if she has any news to give us of the “Shark,”’ said I.

‘We will speak her, of course,’ said Wilfrid.

‘Looks as if she meant to give us the stem,’ exclaimed Finn, with a glance aft at the fellow at the helm; ‘she is steering dead on for us as if her course were a bee-line and we were athwart it.’

‘I expect she’ll not be able to talk to you in English,’ said I.

‘What is her country, do you think, Mr. Monson?’ asked Miss Jennings, closing her volume and joining us.

‘Italian. What say you, captain?’

‘Well, I can’t rightly tell what she is,’ he answered, ‘but I know what she ain’t—and that’s English.’ He stepped aft, bent on the ensign, and ran it aloft.

‘Does she see us?’ exclaimed Wilfrid; ‘really she is steering as if she would run us down.’

I took the captain’s glass and brought it to bear. She was bow on, and there was no sign of a head over the fore-castle rail—nothing living in the rigging or upon the yards either; the foresail concealed the run of her abaft. ‘She appears derelict,’ said I, ‘with her helm secured amidships, and blowing like the wind—as she listeth.’

‘Time to get out of her road, I think,’ grumbled Finn. ‘Down hellum!’

The turn of a spoke or two brought the stranger on the lee bow. Then it was that, on taking another view of her through the glass, I observed a couple of men standing near a jolly-boat, that swung at a pair of heavy wooden davits like a Nantucket whaler's on the quarter. One of them wore a red cap resembling an inverted flower-pot ; the other, whilst he addressed his companion, gesticulated with inconceivable vehemence.

‘Foreigners of a surety!’ said I; ‘they’ll have no news for us.’

All continued quiet; the two vessels approached each other slowly; the stranger now proving herself, as I had supposed her, a brig of about a hundred and eighty tons, as dirty a looking craft as ever I saw, stained in streaks about the hull, as though her crew washed the decks down with the water in which they boiled their meat; her rigging slack and grey for want of tar; the clews of her sails gaping at a distance from her yardarms; and at her mainmast-head an immense weathercock, representing a boat with what I supposed to be a saint standing up in it, with gilt enough left upon the metal of which it was formed to flash dully at intervals as the rolling of the vessel swung the sunlight off and on to it. As she lifted to the floating heave



of the sea she showed a bottom of ugly green sheathing, rich with marine growths, dark patches of barnacles, sea-moss, and long trailings of weed rising vividly green from the sparkle of the brine.

‘What a very horrid-looking boat,’ observed Miss Jennings.

As the girl said this I saw the fellow at the stranger’s wheel revolve it with frantic gestures as though some deadly danger had been descried close aboard; the brig came heavily and sluggishly round right athwart our course, showing no colours, and dipping her channels to the run of the folds with the weary motion of a waterlogged vessel, and so lay all aback. Finn looked on, scarcely understanding the manœuvre, then bawled out, ‘Hard down! Hard down! Chuck her right up in the wind! Why, bless my body and soul, what are the fools aiming at?’

The yacht nimbly answering her helm came to a stand, her square canvas to the mast, her fore and aft sails fluttering.

‘Hail her, Finn!’ cried Wilfrid with excitement.

‘No need, sir; they’re coming aboard,’ answered the captain, and sure enough there were the men, the only two besides the man at the helm who were visible, working like madmen to lower away their jolly-boat. In their red-hot

haste they let her drop with a run, and the fat fabric smote the water so heavily that I looked to see her floating in staves alongside. Then down one fall with the agility of a monkey dropped the man in the red nightcap into her and unhooked the blocks, jumping about like a madman. His companion swung himself down by the other fall, and in a trice both men, sitting so far in the head of the boat as to cock her stern high up whilst her nose was nearly under, were pulling for the yacht as though the devil himself were in pursuit of them.

‘What do they want? The “Bride”?’ exclaimed Wilfrid, breaking into a huge roar of laughter, with a slap of his knee. He had been eyeing the approach of the boat with a sort of high, lifting stare—head thrown back, nostrils round and quivering like an impatient horse’s.

‘The desire of the moth for the star!’ said I to Miss Jennings. ‘But the simile won’t hold; yonder red nightcap spoils the fancy of the moth.’

‘Shall we receive them aboard, sir?’ exclaimed Captain Finn.

‘Certainly,’ responded Wilfrid, with another short shout of laughter.

‘Unship that there gangway,’ sung out Finn; ‘the steps over the side, one of ye.’

The two strange creatures pulled with amazing

contortions. Small wonder that the heap of child-like disposition that pretty well made up the substance of Wilfrid's manhood, should have been stirred into extravagant merriment by the wild movements of the two fellows' bodies, the wind-mill-like flourishings of their oars, the flopping and flapping of the red cap, the incessant straining and twisting of the chocolate faces over the shoulder to see how they were heading, the shrill exclamations that sounded from the instant the fellows were within ear-shot and that never ceased until they had floundered and splashed alongside.

I never beheld two more hideous men. Their skins were begrimed with dirt, and their colour came near to the complexion of the negro with sun and weather and neglect of soap; the hair of the seaman that wore the dirty red nightcap fell in snake-like coils upon his back and shoulders, black as tar and shining as grease. He wore thick gold hoops in his ears and a faded blue sash round his waist; his feet were naked, and for the like of them it would be necessary to hunt the forests of Brazil. The other man wore a slouched felt hat, a pair of grey trousers jammed into half Wellington boots, a jacket confined by a button at the neck, the sleeves thrown over his back, whilst his dark arms, naked to the elbows, were hairy as a baboon's, with a glimpse to be caught

of a most intricate network of gunpowder and Indian ink devices covering the flesh to the very finger-nails. This creature had a very heavy moustache, backed by a pair of fierce whiskers, with flashing, though blood-shot eyes, like a blot of ink upon a slice of orange-peel.

We were in a group at the gangway when they came sputtering alongside, flinging down their oars and walloping about in the wildest conceivable scramble as they made fast the painter and clawed their way up; and the instant they were on our deck they both let fly at us in a torrent of words, not attempting to distinguish amongst us, but both of them addressing first one and then another, all with such mad impetuosity of speech, such smiting of their bosoms, such snapping of their fingers and convulsive brandishing of their fists, that the irrerecognisable tongue in which they delivered themselves was rendered the most hopelessly confounding language that ever bewildered the ear. It was quite impossible to gather what they desired to state. First they would point to our ensign, then to their brig, then to the long gun upon our forecastle, meanwhile talking with indescribable rapidity. Finn tried to check them; he bawled, 'Stop! stop! You no speakee English?' but they only stared and let drive again the moment he ended his question.

‘There’s no good in all this,’ said Wilfrid, ‘we must find out what they want. What the deuce is their language, Charles, d’ye know?’

‘A sort of Portuguese, I imagine,’ said I, ‘but a mighty corrupt specimen of that tongue, I should think.’

‘I will try them in French,’ said he, and approaching the fellow in the red nightcap he bawled in French, with an excellent accent, ‘What is wrong with your ship? What can we do for you?’

Both men shook their heads and broke out together afresh. It was amazing that they should go on jabbering as though we perfectly understood them when one glance at our faces should have assured them that they might as well have addressed the deck on which they stood.

‘Try ’em in Latin, Wilf,’ cried I.

He addressed a few words to them in that tongue, but his English accent extinguished the hint or two they might have found in the words he employed had he pronounced them in South European fashion, and after glaring at him a moment with a deaf face the red-capped man stormed forth again into a passion of speech accompanied by the most incredible gesticulations, pointing to his brig, to our flag, to the cannon as before, winding up in the delirium of his emotion

by flinging his cap down on deck and tearing a handful of hair out of his head.

Our crew were all on deck and had come shouldering one another aft as far as they durst, where they stood looking on, a grinning, hearken-ing, bewhiskered huddle of faces. I thought it just possible that one of them might understand the lingo of our grimy and astonishing visitors, and suggested as much to Captain Finn. He called out, 'Do any one of you men follow what these chaps are a-saying?'

A fellow responded, 'It's Portugee, sir. I can swear to that, though I can't talk in it.'

'Try them in Italian, Laura,' said Wilfrid.

She coloured, and in a very pretty accent that floated to the ear like the soft sounds of a flute after the hoarse, hideous and howling gibberish of the two Dagos, as I judged them, she asked if they were Portuguese. The eyes of the fellow in the slouched hat flashed to a great grin that disclosed a very cavern of a mouth under his moustache widening to his whiskers, and he nodded violently. She asked again in Italian what they required, but this fell dead. They did not understand her, but possibly imagining that *she* could comprehend them they both addressed her at once, raising a most irritating clattering with their tongues.



‘It looks to me,’ said Finn, ‘as if it was a case o’ mutiny. Don’t see what else can sinnify their constant pointing to that there gun and our flag and then their brig.’

I sent a look at the vessel as he spoke, and took notice now of a number of heads along the line of the main-deck rail, watching us in a sort of ducking way, by which I mean to convey a kind of coming and going of those dusky nobbs which suggested a very furtive and askant look-out. She was not above a quarter of a mile off; the wheel showed plain and the man at it kept his face upon us continuously, whilst his posture, Liliputianised as he was, betrayed extraordinary impatience and anxiety. The craft lay aback, the light wind hollowing her sails in-board and her ugly besmeared hull rolling in a manner that I suppose was rendered nauseous to the eye by her colour, her form, her frowsy, ill-cut canvas and her sheathing of sickly hue, foul with slimy weed and squalid attire of repulsive sea-growth upon the long and tender lifting and falling of the sparkling blue. There were some white letters under her counter, but though I took a swift peep at them through Finn’s telescope the shadow there and the long slant of the name towards the sternpost rendered the words indecipherable. The glass showed such heads along the rail as I could fix to

be strictly in keeping with the filth and neglect you saw in the brig and with the appearance of the two men aboard of the schooner. Most of them might have passed for negroes. There were indications of extreme agitation amongst them, visible in a sort of fretful flitting, a constant looking up and around and abaft in the direction of the man at the wheel.

I thought I would try my hand with the red-capped worthy, and striding up to him I sung out 'Capitano'?

He nodded, striking himself, and then pointing to his companion, spoke some word, but I did not understand him. By this time the crew had come shoving one another a little further aft, so that we now made a fair crowd all about the gangway; every man's attention was fixed upon the two Portuguese. It was so odd an experience that it created a sort of licence for the crew, and Finn was satisfied to look on whilst first one and then another of our men addressed the two fellows, striving to coax some meaning out of them by addressing them in 'pigeon' and other forms of English, according to that odd superstition current amongst seamen that our language is most intelligible to foreigners when spoken in a manner the least intelligible to ourselves.

We of the quarterdeck were beginning to

grow weary of all this. The hope of being able to pick up news of the 'Shark' had gone out of Wilfrid's mind long ago ; the humour, moreover, of the two creatures' appearance and apparel was now stale to him, and with folded arms he stood apart watching their gesticulations and listening to their jargon—in which it seemed to me they were telling the same story over and over and over again—with a tired air and a gloomy brow. I drew Finn apart.

‘What is the matter with them, think you?’

‘I dorn't doubt it's a mutiny, sir.’

‘It looks like it certainly. But how can we help them?’

‘We *can't* help them, sir. The best thing we can do, I think, is to order 'em off. You can see, Mr. Monson, his honour's growing sick of the noise.’

I started suddenly.

‘Why, Finn, look!’ I cried, ‘see! they have trimmed sail on the brig and she is under way!’

It was indeed as I had said. Unobserved by us, the people of the vessel had squared the main-yards and flattened in the head-sheets, and there she was away to windward, pushing slowly through it with a brassy wrinkling of water at her stem, her crew running about her as active as ants,

whilst I noticed in the difference of costume that a new man had replaced the fellow who was at the wheel.

‘Mind,’ I shouted, ‘or by Jupiter they’ll run away with the ship and leave this brace of beauties on our hands.’

A single glance enabled Finn to see how it was. In a breath he sprang upon the red-capped man, caught him by the collar, twisted his head round in the direction of the brig whilst he yelled in his ear, ‘Lookee! lookee! your ship go! your ship go; jumpee, jumpee or you loosee ship!’ It was not likely that the grimy creature would have met with a ghost of a hint of the truth in the ‘lookees’ and ‘jumpees’ of friend Finn, but his nose having being slewed in the right direction he instantly saw for himself. He broke out in a long ringing howl which I took to be some tremendous sea-curse in the Portuguese language, and calling his companion’s attention to the brig by striking him with his clenched fist between the shoulders and then indicating the vessel with both arms outstretched in a melodramatic posture that made one think of Masaniello, he uttered another wild roar that was no doubt a further example of Portuguese bad language, and went in a sprawl to the gangway followed by his comrade. In a trice they were over the side and in the boat

and pulling furiously in the direction of the brig.

‘Better trim sail, Captain Finn, so as to lie up for that vessel,’ exclaimed Wilfrid. ‘We must see those men aboard and the little drama played out, though ’tis vexatiously delaying.’

It was now blowing a very light air of wind, yet there was weight enough in it to hold steady the canvas of the Portuguese brig even to the lifting of her foresail, lumpish as those cloths were made by the boom that spread the clews, and one saw by the wake of her that she was stirring through it at a pace to render the pursuit of the boat long and possibly hopeless, if the crew refused to back their yards for the two fellows. The boat was a fat, tub-like fabric, apparently heavy for her size, and the rowers pulled with such alternate heat and passion, that though they made the water buzz and foam about the bows, their motion was as erratic—first to right, then to left, then a spasmodic heave round as though they meant to return to us—as the course of a fly climbing a pane of glass. The whole picture was thrown out strong and clear by the background of sparkling azure water melting into a sort of trembling faintness off the horizon to above the height of the brig’s masts against the sky, which from there ran up in a tint of deep-

ening blue till it whitened out into glory round about the sun. The boat rose and fell upon the long ocean heave, splashed wildly forwards by the two rowers, who again and again would turn their mahogany-coloured faces over their shoulders to yell to the withdrawing vessel. The brig's crew stood in a crowd aft watching, most of them, as the glass disclosed, in a loafing, lounging posture, their bare arms folded or their hands sunk in their breeches-pockets, whilst one or another occasionally pointed at us or the boat with a theatrical attitude of leaning back as he did so that made one fancy one could hear the laughter or the curses which attended these gestures. On high rustily glittered the amazing old weathercock or dog-vane of the saint in his boat, from which would leap with pendulum regularity a dull flame sunwards, timing a like kind of fire which flashed wet from the dirty yellow and sickly green of the hull, as her side rolled streaming to the noon-tide blaze.

‘I say, Wilfrid,’ cried I, ‘it doesn’t seem as if those chaps meant to let that boat approach them.’

‘What’s to be done?’ he exclaimed.

I looked at Finn. ‘If they don’t pick those two fellows up,’ said I, ‘*we* shall have to do so, that’s cocksure. But they are a kind of beauties whose room is better than their company, I think,



as the crew would find out when we approached the equinoctial waters.'

'Ay, sir,' cried Finn, 'it would never do to have the likes o' them aboard, your honour,' addressing Sir Wilfrid. 'No, no, the brig must pick 'em up. Dang their cruel hearts! I never seed a scurvier trick played at sea in all my days.'

'But what's to be done?' cried Wilfrid impatiently and irritably. 'Could one of our boats overhaul the brig and put the two fellows aboard her?'

Finn shook his head.

'See here, Wilf,' said I: 'suppose we let slip a blank shot at her out of that eighteen-pounder yonder? The dirty herd of scowbankers may take us to be a man of war. And another idea on top of this!' cried I, bursting into a laugh. 'Is there anything black aboard that we can fly at the masthead? It should prove a warrant of our honesty that must puzzle them gloriously.'

'Would a black shawl do, Mr. Monson?' said Miss Jennings.

'The very thing,' said I, 'if it's big enough.'

She immediately went below.

'I think a blank shot's a first class idea,' exclaimed Finn, 'but as to a black flag——' and he cocked his eye dubiously at the masthead, whilst his face visibly lengthened.

‘Why a *black* flag, Charles?’ cried Wilfrid.

‘Why, my dear Wilf,—the pirate’s bunting, you know. The rogues may take us for a pica-roon—no telling the persuasive influence of a black banner upon the nerves of such gentry.’

‘Noble! noble!’ shouted Wilfrid, slapping his leg: ‘frighten them, Finn, frighten them. Why, man, they can’t be *all* fools, and some of them at least will very well know that that ensign up there,’ pointing to the commercial flag at our peak, ‘is not her Britannic Majesty’s red cross. But a black flag—oh, yes, by all means if we can but muster such a thing. And get that gun loaded, will ye, Finn? get it done at once, I say.’

The skipper walked hurriedly forward as Miss Laura arrived with a black cashmere or crape shawl—I do not recollect the material. We held it open between us.

‘The very thing,’ I cried, and full of excitement—for here was something genuine in the way of an incident to break in upon the monotony of a sea trip—I bent the shawl on to the signal halliards that led from the main-topmast head and sent it aloft in a little ball, ready to break when the gun should be fired.

Meanwhile all was bustle forwards. It is a question whether Jack does not love firing off a cannon even better than beating a drum. Miss

Jennings walked right aft as far as she could go, holding her fingers in readiness for her ears and saying to me as she passed that sudden noises frightened her. Wilfrid stood alongside of me, glancing with a boyish expression of excitement and expectation from the seamen congregated round the gun to the little black ball at the masthead. The yacht was slowly overhauling the brig, but almost imperceptibly. The boat maintained an equidistance betwixt us and was struggling, wabbling, and splashing fair in a line with our cutwater and the lee-quarter of the Portuguese craft. The two rowers exhibited no signs of exhaustion, though I expected every minute to find one or both of them give up and disappear, dead beaten, in the bottom of their tub.

‘All ready forward, sir,’ shouted Finn; ‘will your honour give us the signal when to fire?’

As he sung out the group of seamen hustled backwards from the gun and thinned into meagre lines of spectators at a safe distance.

‘Fire!’ bawled Wilfrid.

There was a glance of flame past the bow port, a roar that tingled through the decks into one’s very marrow, and the sea turned blind with white smoke, iridescent as a cobweb, over the

bows of the 'Bride.' I tugged at the signal halliards, broke my little ball, and the black shawl floated out fair from the masthead, as sinister a piratic symbol as one could have desired and not an atom the less malignant in significance for wanting the old-fashioned embellishments of the cross-bones and skull. I saw the Jacks forward looking up at the sight with grinning wonderment. However, it was easy to see by their way of laughing, staring and turning to one another, that they twigged the motive of that wild marine exhibition. I sprang to the peak signal halliards and hauled the ensign down, for the black flag combines but ill with the Union Jack, and then went to the side to see what the brig was about. Either she did not understand our meaning, or was resolved not to take any hint from us. She held on doggedly without a touch of the braces or a shift of the helm by the length of a spoke, with her people watching us and the pursuing boat from over the taffrail, a cluster of sulphur-coloured faces, as they looked at that distance, but harmonising excellently well, I thought, with the dingy yellow of the canvas rising in ungainly spaces over their heads and the sickly hue of the brig's hull with its shiny, pease-soup-like reflection in the water to the lift of the squalid fabric upon some polished brow of swell.

‘Wilfrid,’ cried I, ‘they don’t mean to pick up their boat.’

‘It looks like it,’ said he; ‘what’s to be done? There’s something confoundedly insulting in the rogues’ indifference to our gun and colours.’

‘Better consult with Finn,’ said I.

He called to the skipper, who came to us from the fore-castle.

‘I say, Finn, what are we to do? We don’t want those two filthy fellows aboard this yacht; and yet, if that brig don’t pick them up, we can’t of course let them remain adrift here.’

‘Arm a boat’s crew,’ said I; ‘you have weapons enough below. Take those two fellows out of yonder boat and compel the brig to receive them. I’ll take charge with pleasure if Finn’ll permit.’

Finn, a slow, sober, steady old merchant seaman, did not seem to see this. The expression of worry made his long face comical with the puzzled twist at the corners of his mouth, which looked to be, in his countenance, where most men’s noses are situated.

‘Or,’ said I, observing him to hang in the wind, ‘make them really believe that those are the colours we sail under,’ pointing to the shawl, ‘by slapping a round-shot at them in sober earnest, leaving the missile to take its chance of missing or hitting.’

‘That’s it,’ almost shrieked Wilfrid in his excitement; ‘yes! that’ll save the botheration of boat-lowering and arguefication and perhaps bloodshed, by George! Run forward now, Finn, and let fly a round-shot at that ugly brute; hit her if you can, no matter where, that they may know we’re in earnest, and that they may believe if they don’t heave to we shall sink them. No remonstrance, Finn, for heaven’s sake! Jump, my dear fellow. Dash it, man,’ he cried passionately, with a quite furious gesture in the direction of the brig, ‘*that’s* not the object of our chase!’

Finn, with an air of concern but awed also by Wilfrid’s temper and insistence, hurried on to the forecastle. I watched them load the gun a second time, and burst into a laugh when I saw two fellows rise out of the fore hatch, each of them hugging an eighteen-pound shot to his heart.

‘Only one ball at a time,’ shouted Wilfrid, conceiving very likely that they meant to double shot the gun.

‘Ay, ay, sir,’ responded Finn.

The crew backed away as before. The stout, whiskered seaman, with a face that made one think of a red apple snugged in a setting of horse-hair, who had previously fired the gun and who was apparently the ‘Bride’s’ gunner, sighted the



piece with a deliberateness that made me expect wonders. We all held our breath. I fixed my eye on the brig to observe, if possible, where the shot struck her. Then, crash! Had the cannon been loaded to the muzzle the blast could not have been more deafening. The thunder of it swept with a thrill, out and away fiercer than the tremble of the first shock, through the deck and was almost immediately followed by a loud and fearful yell from the forecastle. I thought the gun had burst.

‘Merciful powers! What has happened?’ cried Wilfrid.

Captain Finn came bowling aft fast as his legs would travel, shouting as he ran.

‘What is it? what is it?’ my cousin and I roared out in one voice.

‘The shot’s struck the boat, your honours, and *sunk her!*’ bellowed Finn.

I looked, and sure enough where the boat had been there was nothing to be seen but the violet slope of the swell softly drawing out of the cloud of powder-smoke that was settling in lengthening, glistening folds towards the brig! I thought I observed something dark however, and snatching up Finn’s telescope from the skylight-top I levelled it and made out the head of the man with the red nightcap holding by an oar

or bit of wreckage. I shouted out that one of the men was alive in the water. The dismay was universal, but there was no disorder, no commotion. By waiting a little the 'Bride,' even as she was heading, would have floated to the spot where that melancholy red beacon was bobbing; but the delay this would have involved was not to be dreamt of. With a smartness that excited my admiration, man-of-wars-man as I had been in my time, our largest boat, a six-oared fabric, with sour old Crimp in the stern-sheets, was lowered and pulled away with splendid precision in the direction of the red nightcap. In a few minutes they had got the fellow in-boards; they then hung upon their oars, looking round and round; but the other unfortunate creature, he of the slouched hat and black and flashing eyes, had found a sailor's grave. I sought with the glass over a broad field of water, but could see nothing. Indeed there was not a vestige left of the boat save what the red-capped chap had clung to.

'One of them killed! Heaven have mercy upon us,' groaned Wilfrid in my ear, and his appearance was full of dreadful consternation.

Meanwhile the brig ahead was holding steadfastly on, her crowd of people aft gazing at us as before. I took a view of them; they all held a sort of gaping posture; there were no dramatic

gesticulations, no eager and derisive turning to one another, no pointing arms and backward-leaning attitudes. They had as thunderstruck an air as can be imagined in a mob of men. What they supposed us to be *now* after our extermination of the boat and one of the two fellows who had sought our assistance, it was impossible to conjecture.

Our boat, that had sped away from us about four times faster than we were moving through the water, hung, with lifted oars, over the spot where our cannon-ball had taken effect until the 'Bride' had slowly surged to within hail; then up stood sour Crimp.

'What are we to do?'

'Have you got both men?' bawled Finn, who perfectly well knew that they hadn't.

'No; there was but one to get, and here he is,' and Crimp pointed into the bottom of the boat.

'Put him aboard his ship,' cried Finn. 'If they refuse to receive him, find out if there's e'er a one of 'em that can speak English, and then tell them that if they don't take him we shall arm our men and compel 'em to it; and if *that* don't do we'll keep all on firing into 'em till they follow the road that's been took by their jolly-boat.'

His long face was purple with temper and the

effort of shouting, and he turned it upon Wilfrid, who nodded a fierce excited approval, whilst I cried, 'That's it, that's it; they *must* take him.'

Crimp held up his hand in token of having heard the captain, then seated himself; the oars fell and flashed as they rose wet to the sun, every gold-bright blade in a line, and the foam went spinning away from the bows of the little craft in snow to the magnificent disciplined sweep of those British muscles. In a jiffy she was on the brig's quarter, with Crimp erect in her, gesticulating to the crowd who overhung the rail. I kept the telescope bearing on them and it seemed to me that the whole huddle of them jabbered to Crimp all together, an indistinguishable hubbub, to judge from the extraordinary contortions into which every individual figure flung itself, some of them going to the lengths of spinning round in their frenzy, whilst others leapt upon the rail and addressed the boat's crew with uplifted arms, as though they called all sorts of maledictions down upon our men. This went on for a few minutes, then I saw the bow-oar fork out his boat-hook and drag the boat to the main channels into which, all very expeditiously, two or three brawny pairs of arms lifted the red-capped man. Then four of our fellows sprang into the chains, handed the little creature over the rail and let him drop

in-boards. They then re-entered their boat and fell astern of the brig by a few fathoms, holding their station there by a soft plying of oars, Crimp's notion probably being, as ours was indeed, that the Portuguese crew would presently send our friend the red-cap to follow his mate.

We waited, watching intently. On a sudden I spied the red-cap in the heart of the mob of men that had clustered again near the wheel. His gesticulations were full of remonstrance; his people writhed round about him in the throes of a Portuguese argument, but it seemed to me as I followed their gestures and their way of turning their faces towards us, that their talk was all about our schooner, as though indeed their mutinous passions had been diverted by our cannon-shot in a direction that boded no particular evil to the red-capped man.

'They'll not hurt the creature, I believe,' said I.

'Call the men aboard, Finn,' exclaimed Wilfrid, 'and get the "Bride" to her course.'

## CHAPTER XII.

## A SECOND WARNING.

I HAULED down the shawl from the masthead, carefully unbent, folded and gave it to Miss Jennings, who stood with Wilfrid watching the Portuguese brig. We had hoisted in our boat, and the men were busy about the decks coiling up after having trimmed sail.

‘Once more heading a fair course for the “Shark,”’ said I with a glance at the compass ‘This has been a neat morning’s work. A few incidents of the kind should make out a lively voyage.’

‘Oh but it’s dreadful to think of that poor man having been drowned!’ exclaimed Miss Jennings. ‘I was watching the boat before the gun was fired. In an instant she vanished. She might have been a phantom. She melted out upon the water as a snow-flake would. I pressed my eyes, for I could not believe them at first.’

‘Horrible!’ exclaimed Wilfrid in a hollow, melancholy voice; ‘what had that miserable



creature done that we should take his life? Have we insensibly—insensibly—courted some curse of heaven upon this yacht? Who was the villain that did it?’ He wheeled round passionately: ‘Finn—Captain Finn, I say!’ he shouted.

The captain, who was giving directions to some men in the waist, came aft.

‘Who was it that fired that shot, Finn?’ cried my cousin in his headlong way, jerking his head as it were at Finn with the question, whilst his arms and legs twitched and twisted as though to an electric current.

‘A man named O’Connor, Sir Wilfrid,’ responded Finn.

‘Did he do it expressly, think you?’

‘I wouldn’t like to say that, your honour. The fellow’s a blunderhead. I inquired if there was e’er a man for’ard as could load and sight a cannon, and this chap stands up and says that he’d sarved for three years in a privateer and was reckoned the deadest shot out of a crew of ninety men.’

‘Call him aft,’ said Wilfrid. ‘If he aimed at that boat intentionally it’s murder—call him aft!’

He took some impatient strides to and fro with a face that worked like a ship in a seaway with the conflict of emotions within him, whilst Finn

going a little way forward, sung out for O'Connor. Meanwhile we were rapidly widening the distance between us and the brig. I protest it was with an honest feeling of relief that I watched her sliding into a toy-like shape with promise of nothing showing presently but some radiant film of her topmost canvas in the silver azure that streaked by a hand's breadth, as it looked, the whole girdle of the horizon; for one was never to know but that her people might send the red-capped man adrift for us to pick up, or worry us in some other way.

Finn arrived, followed by the Irishman who had discharged the gun; his immense black whiskers stood out thick, straight, inflexible as the bristles of a chimney-sweep's brush, contrasting very extraordinarily with the bright apple-red of his cheeks and the blue, Hibernian, seawardly eye that glimmered under a dense black thatch of brow. He stood bolt upright soldier-fashion, with his arms straight up and down by his side like pump-handles, and fixed an unwinking stare upon whoever addressed him.

'You fired that gun, Captain Finn says,' exclaimed Wilfrid.

'Oi did, your honour.'

'What made you take aim at the boat?'

‘Your honour, by the holy eleven, I took aim at the brig. There’s something wrong with the pace.’

‘Wrong with the piece. What d’ye mean?’

‘It was cast with a kink, sorr; it dhroops amidships and shoots as Mither Crimp’s larboard oye peeps, your honour, though loike his oye it manes well.’

‘Nonsense,’ I cried, ‘you must have covered the boat to hit it.’

‘By all that’s sacred then,’ cried the man, ‘I had the natest observation of the brig’s main-topmasht as ever oye could bring the muzzle of a pace to soight. The gun was cast with a kink, sorr.’

‘My belief is that you’re utterly ignorant of guns,’ cried Wilfrid. ‘The concussion was fierce enough to shake the yacht to pieces.’

‘’Twas your honour’s design to froighten ’em.’

‘But not to murder them, you dolt!’ shouted Wilfrid. ‘D’ye know I could have you *hanged* for this.’

‘It was but a haythen Portuguay, sorr,’ answered the fellow, preserving his ramrod-like posture and his unwinking stare.

‘Tell him to go forward, Finn; tell him to go forward,’ cried Wilfrid, ‘and see that he never

has any more to do with that gun on any account whatever, d'ye understand?'

The seaman knuckled his forehead and wheeled round, but methought I could just catch a glimpse past his whisker of a sudden protrusion of the cheek as though he was signalling with his tongue to a brother Jack who was flemish-coiling a rope not very far from where he was standing.

The luncheon bell rang and we went below. At table we could talk of nothing but the unhappy Portuguese whom our round-shot had sent to the bottom. Muffin's face of respectful horror was a feature of the time which I recall more vividly than even the disaster itself. This man, though he was in attendance on Wilfrid as a valet, regularly stood behind his master's chair at meals. It was Wilfrid's whim to have him at hand. He did not offer to wait unless it was to procure anything my cousin might require when the stewards were busy with Miss Jennings and myself, or one or both of them absent. His air of deferential consternation was exceedingly fine as he listened to our talk about the annihilated boat and the foundered foreigner—'Who,' said I with a glance at his yellow visage, the shocked expression of which he tried to smother by twisting his lips into a sort of shape that might pass as a faint obsequious simper and by keeping

his eyelids lowered, 'let us trust was cut in halves, for then his extinction would be painless ; for after all, drowning, though it is reckoned an agreeable death after consciousness has fled, is mortal agony, I take it, whilst the sensation of suffocation remains.'

Muffin's left leg fell away with an exceedingly nervous crooking of it in the trouser, and he turned up his eyes an instant to the upper deck with so sickly a roll, that spite of myself I burst into a laugh, though I swiftly recovered myself.

'It is strange, Charles,' exclaimed my cousin in a raven-like note, 'that a ghastly incident of this kind should sit so lightly on your mind, considering that you have quitted the sea for years and have led a far more effeminate life ashore than I who have been roughing it on the ocean when very likely you were lounging with a bored face in an opera stall or dozing over a cigar in some capacious club armchair. Had you been chasing slavers or pitching cannon shot into African villages down to the present moment, I could almost understand your indifference to a business that's going to haunt me for the rest of my days.'

'Nonsense!' I exclaimed, 'it was a bad job I admit, but a pure accident, not more tragical than had the boat capsized and drowned the man. There would be nothing in a twenty-fold

uglier mishap to haunt you. But I'll tell you what, though,' I continued, talking on to avert the sentimental argument which I saw strong in Wilfrid's face, 'the incident of this morning points a very useful moral.'

'What moral?' he demanded.

'Why, that we must not be in too great a hurry to speak every sail we sight.'

'Finn knows my wishes; we must hear all we can about the "Shark,"' cried Wilfrid warmly.

'The very vessel that we neglect to speak,' exclaimed Miss Jennings softly—she had spoken but little and it was easy to see through the transparency of her unaffected manner that the tragic affair of the morning had made a very deep impression on her—'might prove the one ship of all we pass that could most usefully direct us.'

'Two to one!' said I, giving her a bow and smiling to the look of coy reproach in her charming eyes; 'of course, Miss Jennings, I have no more to say. At least,' I added, turning to Wilfrid, 'on the head of speaking passing ships, though the moral I find in this forenoon trouble is not exhausted.'

'Well?' said he a little imperiously, leaning towards me on one elbow with his nails at his



lips and the spirit of restlessness quick as the blood in his veins in every lineament.

‘Well,’ said I, echoing him, ‘my suggestion is that your Long Tom’s murderous mission should be peremptorily cut short by your ordering Finn to strike the noisy old barker at once down into the hold, where he’ll be a deuced deal more useful as ballast than as a fore-castle toy for the illustration of Irish humour.’

‘No!’ shouted Wilfrid, fetching the table a whack with his fist: ‘so say no more about it, Charles. Strange that *you*, who should possess the subtlest and strongest of any kind of human sympathy for and with me—I mean the sympathy of blood—should so absolutely fail to appreciate my determination and to accept my purpose! That girl there,’ pointing with his long arm to Miss Laura, ‘can read my heart and, of her sweetness, justify and approve all she finds there. But *you*, my dear Charles’—he softened his voice though he continued speaking with warmth nevertheless—‘*you*, my own first cousin, *you* to whom my honour should be hardly less dear than your own—*you* would have me abandon this pursuit—forego every detail of my carefully prepared programme—blink with a cynical laziness at my own and my infant’s degradation and turn to the law—to the law

forsooth!—for the appeasement or extinction of every just yearning and of every consuming desire of my manhood. No by G—!’ he roared, ‘fate may be against me, but even *her* iron hand can be forced by a heart goaded as mine has been and is.’

He rose from the table and without another word went to his cabin.

We had been for some time alone—I mean that Muffin and the stewards had left us. When my cousin was gone I looked at Miss Jennings.

‘Forgive me, Mr. Monson,’ she exclaimed with a little blush and speaking with an enchanting diffidence, ‘but I fear—indeed I am sure, that any, even the lightest, suggestion that runs counter to Wilfrid’s wishes irritates him. And,’ she added almost in a whisper, ‘I think it is dangerous to irritate him.’

‘I have no wish to irritate him, believe me, Miss Jennings,’ said I. ‘I desire to be of some practical help, and my recommendations have no other motive. But I give you my word if this sort of thing goes on I shall grow selfish, nay, alarmed if you like. I certainly never anticipated these melodramatic displays, these tragic rebukes, when I accepted his offer of the voyage. Pray consider: if Wilf, poor fellow, should grow worse, if his actions should result in exhibiting him

as irresponsible, what's to be done? Heaven forbid that I should say a word to alarm you—' she shook her head with a smile: I was a little abashed but proceeded nevertheless—' we are not upon dry land here. The ocean is as full of the unexpected as it is of fish. Finn is a plain steady man with brains enough, but then he is not in command in the sense that a captain is in command when we speak of a ship whose skipper is lord paramount. He will obey as Wilfrid orders, and I say, Miss Jennings, with all submission to your engaging, to your beautiful desires as a sister, that if Wilfrid's humour is going to gain on him at the rate at which I seem to find it growing, it will be my business, as I am certain it will be my duty for everybody's sake as well as for yours and his own, so to contrive this unparalleled pursuit as to end it swiftly.'

She was silent—a little awed, I think, by my emphatic manner, perhaps by a certain note of sternness, for I had been irritated, besides being nervous; and then, again, my distaste for the trip worked very strongly in me whilst I was talking to her.

We were a somewhat gloomy ship for the rest of the day. I noticed that the seamen wore tolerably grave faces at their several jobs, and it was easy to gather that, now they had had time

to digest the incident of the morning it was as little to their taste as it was to ours aft. Indeed it was impossible to tell what kind of omen they might manufacture out of so tragic an affair. Sailors were very much more superstitious in those days than they are now; the steam fiend has wonderfully cleared the atmosphere of the fore-castle, and the sea-goblin has long since made his final dive from the topgallant-rail to keep company with the mermaid in her secret bower of coral in a realm fathoms deep beneath the ocean ooze. O'Connor tried very hard to look as if he felt that on the whole he almost deserved to be hanged for his blundersome extermination of the Portugee heathen; at least this seemed his air when, as he sat stitching on a sail in the waist, he suspected a quarterdeck gaze to be directed at him. But it is hard for a man with merry blue eyes and cheeks veritably grinning with ruddiness in the embrace of a huge hearty pair of carefully doctored whiskers to look contrite. The Irishman did his best, but I laughed to see how the instant he forgot his part nature jovially broke out in him again.

Crimp had charge that afternoon, and when I arrived on deck with a cigar in my mouth, leaving Miss Jennings and her maid hanging together over a hat whose feather in some way

or other had gone wrong, I asked the mate what was his opinion of the accident of the morning.

‘Ain’t got any opinion about it at all,’ he answered.

‘It was an accident, let us believe,’ said I.

‘Pure hignorance more like,’ he answered. ‘That there O’Connor’s regularly ate up with pride. He’s all bounce. Says he’s descended from kings and if he had his rights he’d be at the head o’ Ulster or some such place as that, ’stead of an able seaman. *He* know anything ’bout firing off cannons!’ making a horrible face and going to the side to spit.

‘Did they understand what you said aboard the brig when you talked to them from the boat?’

‘Ne’er a word.’

‘Was the red-capped man hurt?’

‘Dazed. Eyes pretty nigh out on’s cheeks. He was too full o’ salt water to curse, I allow, so when we hauled him into the boat he fell on his knees and prayed. A bloomin’ poor job; a measly mean business! Knocking of a boat to pieces an’ drownin’ of a man. What’s the good o’ that there gun? Only fit to kick up a plaguey shindy. Next time it may bust and then, stand by! for I once see an explosion.’

‘Is there anything wrong with the piece as O’Connor suggests?’ said I, much enjoying the old chap’s sourness, which I may say was not a little in harmony with my mood that afternoon.

‘ Couldn’t tell if ye offered me all ye was worth. My business ain’t guns. I shipped to do my bit and my bit I’ll *do*, but the line’s chalked a mighty long way this side o’ hordnance.’

I walked on to the forecandle to inspect the gun for myself. O’Connor watched me with the whole round of his face, broad and purple as the rising moon. The gun was of an elderly fashion but it looked a very substantial weapon, with a murderous grin in the gape of it and a long slim throat that warranted a venomous delivery. The kink the Irishman spoke of was altogether in his eye.

I returned to the quarterdeck, relighted my cigar, stowed myself comfortably away in the chair I had at an earlier hour procured for Miss Jennings, and pulling from my pocket a little handy edition of one of Walter Scott’s novels, was speedily transported leagues away from the ocean by the spells of that delightful wizard. Thus passed the afternoon. Miss Jennings remained below, and Wilfrid lay hid in his cabin. It was very pleasant weather. The sky was a clear blue from line to line, with just a group of faint bronze-browed clouds of a dim cream at the horizon looming in the azure air far away down in the north-west. The wind was cool though salt, a pleasant breeze from the east with a trifle of northing in



it, and very steadily the yacht travelled quietly over the plain of twinkling waters, cradled by a soft western heaving. She made no stir forwards saving now and again a sound as of the pressure of a light foot upon tinderish brushwood; every sail that would draw was packed on her, to her triangular lower studdingsail, the reflection of which waved in the tremulous blue like a sheet of quicksilver, fluctuating as it drained downwards.

Still it was dull work. I would often break away from Scott to send a glance at the skylight where I could just get a peep at the ruddy glow of Miss Laura's hair, as she sat at the table with her maid near her, and heartily wished she would join me. Crimp's company was like pickles, a very little of it went a long way. Had etiquette permitted I should have been glad to go amongst the men and yarn with them, for I could not doubt there was a store of amusing experiences lying behind some of the rugged hairy countenances scattered about the decks. Indeed no summons ever greeted my ear more cheerfully than the first dinner bell; for whether one has an appetite or not, sitting down to a meal on board ship is something to do.

Nothing that need make a part of this story happened that night. Wilfrid was reserved, but his behaviour and the little he said were collected

enough to make one wonder at the lengths he would occasionally go the other way. He brought a large diary from his cabin, and sat writing in it up to a short while before going to bed. I cannot imagine what he had to put down, unless, indeed, he were posting up the book from some old date. It found him occupation, however, and he was a good deal in labour too throughout, I thought, often biting the feather of his pen, casting his eyes up, plunging his fingers into his hair and frowning upon the page, and comporting himself, in a word, as though he were composing an epic poem. I played at beggar-my-neighbour with Miss Jennings, showed her some tricks at cards, and she told my fortune. She said she could read my future by looking at my hand, and I feel the clasp of her fingers still, and smell the perfume of her hair and behold the brightness of it, and see her poring upon my palm talking low that Wilfrid should not be disturbed, tracing the lines with a rosy finger-nail with an occasional lift of her eyes to mine, the violet of them dark as hazel and brilliant in the oil flames—it might have happened an hour ago, so keen is this particular memory.

It was as peaceful an ocean night as any man could imagine of the weather up in the seas which our yacht was still stemming; moonless, for the

planet rose late now, but spacious and radiant with stars. There was the phantasm of a craft when I went on deck about a mile on the bow of us, in the spangled dusk looking like ice, so fine and delicate was the white of her canvas ; but no notice was taken of her. Finn trudged over to the gloom to leeward when I rose up through the hatch, possibly mistaking me for my cousin, and manifestly anxious to shirk the job of having anything to do with the stranger. I watched her pass—a mere wraith of a ship she looked, sliding her three stately spires that seemed to melt upon the eye as you watched them under the red tremble and green and diamond-like sparkling of the luminaries which looked down upon her. By the time she had faded out like a little puff of steam in the dumb shadow astern, my pipe was smoked out, and I went below and to bed, scarce having exchanged three words with Finn, and musing much on my fortune that Miss Laura had read in my hand—that my ‘line of life’ was very long, that in middle life I should meet with a woman who would fascinate me, but that, nevertheless, I should die as I had lived, a bachelor.

Next morning Wilfrid did not appear at the breakfast-table. Muffin informed me that his master had passed a very bad night, had not

closed his eyes, indeed, and for hour after hour had paced the cabin, sometimes going on deck.

‘Is he ill, do you think?’ I inquired.

‘Not exactly ill, sir,’ he answered in his sleekest manner, with the now familiar crook of one knee and his arms hanging straight up and down.

‘What then?’ I demanded, perceiving that the fellow had more to say, though his very humble and obsequious respectfulness would not suffer him to express much at a time.

‘I fear, sir,’ he exclaimed, looking down, ‘that yesterday’s ’orrid tragedy has preyed upon his nerves, which, as you are of course aware, sir, is uncommonly delicate.’

I thought this probable, and, as the man was going to his master’s cabin with a cup of tea from the breakfast-table, I told him to give Sir Wilfrid my love and to say that I should be glad to look in and sit with him. He returned to tell me my cousin thanked me, but that he would be leaving his berth presently, and would then join me in a pipe on deck.

There was a fresh breeze blowing, and the yacht was plunging through it in a snowstorm, rising buoyant to the bow surge with a broad dazzle of racing water over the lee-rail, and a

smother of white roaring in a cataract from under her counter. There was wind in the misty shining of the sun and in the spaces of dim blue between the driving clouds. The ocean was gay with tints, flying cloud-shadows of slate, broad tracts of hurrying blue rich and gloriously fresh, with a ceaseless flashing of the heads of the dissolving billows, dashes of lustrous yellow to the touch of the sun that, you would see, sweeping a rusty ball of copper through a mass of smoke-like vapour and then leaping out, moist and rayless, into some speeding lagoon of clear heaven. The horizon throbbed to the walls of the dimness that circled the line all the way round, and my first glance was for a ship; but all was bare ocean. From time to time the fellow on the topgallant-yard ogled the slope over either bow in a way that made me imagine some sort of hope of the 'Shark' heaving into view had come to the sailors out of this rushing morning. I waited for Miss Jennings, thinking she would arrive on deck; but, after stumping to and fro for a half-hour or thereabouts, and passing the skylight, I saw her and Wilfrid in close conversation standing almost directly beneath, he gesticulating with great energy, but speaking in a subdued voice, and she watching him with a troubled face. Passing the skylight again, a little later on, I

caught sight of Wilfrid's figure marching up and down with irregular, broken strides, whilst the girl, leaning with her hand upon the back of a chair, continued to gaze at him, with now and again a little movement of the arm which suggested that she was endeavouring to reassure or to reason with him.

I got alongside of Finn and fell into a yarn with him. One thing led to another, and Lady Monson's name was mentioned.

‘Was she a pleasant lady?’ said I.

‘Ay, to look at, your honour. Up to the hammer. A little too much of her, some folks might think, but such eyes, sir! such teeth! and talk of *figures*!’ and here he delivered a low prolonged whistle of admiration.

‘She was a tolerably amiable lady, I suppose?’ said I carelessly.

‘Well, sir, if you’ll forgive me for saying of it, that’s just what she *wasn’t*,’ he replied. ‘She was one of them parties as can be very glad and very sorry for themselves and for nobody else. She steered Sir Wilfrid as I might this here “Bride.” She needed but to set her course and the craft answered the shift of helm right away off. Ye never saw her, sir?’

‘Never.’

‘Well, she hadn’t somehow the appearance of



what I tarm a marrying woman. She looked to be one of them splendid females as can't abide husbands for the reason that, being made up of vanity, nothing satisfies 'em but the sort of admiration that sweethearts feels. I took notice once that, she being seated in a cheer, as it might be there,' said he, indicating a part of the deck with a nod of his long head, 'Sir Wilfrid draws up alongside of her to see if she were comfortable and if he could run on any errand for her; she scarcely gave him a look as she answered short as though his merely being near fretted her. But a minute arter up steps a gent from the cabin, the Honourable Mr. Lacy, and dawdles up to her, pulling at his bit of a whisker and showing of his teeth over a long puking of "Haw! haws!" and "Yaases:" and then see the change in her ladyship! Gor bless my heart and soul, your honour, 'twarn't the same woman. She hadn't smiles enough for this here honourable. Her voice was like curds and whey. She managed the colour in her cheeks, too, somehow and bloomed out upon the poor little dandy when a minute afore her face to her husband was as blank as a custard. No, Mr. Monson, sir, her ladyship wasn't a marrying woman. She was one of them ladies meant by natur to sit in a gilt cheer in the heart of a crowd

of young men all a-bowing to and a-worshipping of her; very different from her sister, sir. That little lady down below there I allow'll have the true makings of an English wife and an English mother in her, for all she's an Australian.'

'I suppose, then, you were not very much surprised when you heard of Lady Monson's elopement?'

'No more surprised, your honour, than a man can be when a thing that he's been expecting has happened. But she's not going to stick to the colonel. If his honour don't overhaul the "Shark" and separate 'em she'll be separating herself long afore the time it 'ud occupy the schooner to sail round the world. Lord love 'ee, sir; if I were to hear of her heeloping with some African king, atop of an elephant, it wouldn't surprise me. When a woman like her allows a chap to cut her cable he must be a wiser man than e'er a prophet of them all that's writ about who's going to tell you where the hull'll strand or bring up.'

As he delivered himself of these words Sir Wilfrid showed in the hatch handing Miss Jennings up the ladder, and my companion started away on a lonely quarterdeck walk. The girl looked very grave and worried; my cousin, gaunt and haggard, with a fire in his weak, pro-

truding eyes that was like the light of fever or of famine. He grasped my hand and held it whilst he sent a look round. I spoke lightly of the fine breeze and the yacht's pace and the good runs we should be making if this weather held, finding something in his instant's assumption of a hearty demeanour, a sort of strained liveliness far more affecting than his melancholy, that was like a request to me not to venture upon any sort of personal inquiries. He called to Finn to know the speed, then said, 'Charles, give Laura your arm, will you? There's too much wind to sit. She looks a little pale, but a few turns will give roses to her cheeks. My head aches, and I must keep below out of this air till I am better.'

Miss Jennings took my arm, for there would happen a frequent lee swing with a rise of the bow and a long slanting rush to the whole weight of the cloths till you could have spooned up the white water over the side with your hand that rendered walking difficult and fatiguing; very soon I placed chairs under the weather bulwarks, snugging her with rugs and shawls, and in the comparative calm of that shelter we were able to converse.

'Wilfrid looks very ill this morning,' said I.

'He has had another warning,' she answered.

'The deuce he has. When?'

‘Last night.’

‘What sort of a warning is it this time?’

‘Precisely the same as the first one,’ she replied.

‘I am grieved but not surprised,’ said I. ‘I very much fear he is going from bad to worse. I still hold with the views I expressed last evening. A time may, nay, a time must come, when you yourself, Miss Jennings, ardent as is your sisterly desire, will look to me for some resolution that shall preserve us and himself too from the schemes of a growing distemper.’ She was silent. ‘Did he tell you,’ I continued, ‘the nature of the warning?’

‘Yes,’ she answered.

‘In confidence? If so, of course——’

‘No,’ she interrupted, ‘he came from his cabin after breakfast when you had gone on deck, and I saw at once that something was very wrong with him. I was determined to get at the truth and questioned him persistently, and then he told me all.’

‘*All!*’ exclaimed I, opening my eyes, for the word seemed to indicate some very large matter lying behind his confession.

‘What he has seen,’ she said, ‘for two nights running has been a mysterious writing upon his cabin wall.’

‘Humph!’ said I.

‘Do you remember, Mr. Monson, that he told us of a dream in which he had seen a boat with a sort of sign-board in it on which was inscribed the word Monday in letters of flame? Well, he sees the same sort of fiery scrawl now in his cabin.’

‘What is the nature of the message?’

‘He says that the words are ‘RETURN TO BABY!’

‘He has dreamt this,’ said I, ‘or it is some wretched trick of the sight or brains; but I would rather believe it a dream.’

‘It is an illusion of some kind no doubt,’ she exclaimed, ‘but it is strange that it should occur, be the cause what it will, on two successive nights and much about the same time. No wonder the poor fellow is depressed this morning. It is not only that he fears this warning as signifying that something is seriously wrong with baby, and that it is a mysterious command to him to return to her at once; he dreads that it may occur again to-night and to-morrow night, continuously indeed, until it actually drives him mad by obliging him to make up his mind either to neglect his child or to abandon his pursuit of his wife.’

‘The long and short of it is, Miss Jennings,’ said I, ‘that when it comes to one’s being thrown with a man whose mind is a misfit that’s apt to

shift like an ill-stowed cargo to any breeze of wind that heels the craft over, one must "stand by," as sailors say, for troublesome half-hours and bewilderingly unexpected confrontments.'

But there was no use in my telling her the wish was strong in my mind that if it was to be Wilfrid's unhappy destiny to grow worse, then the sooner he acted in such a way as to force all hands to see that it would be at his own as well as at our peril to leave him at large and to suffer him to preserve control over the movements of the yacht, and by consequence the lives and fortunes of those who sailed in her, the better; for I protest that even in the thick of my talk with the girl I never sent a glance at the white roll of spinning waters twisting and roaring away alongside without a sense of the absurdity of the whole business, the aimlessness of the pursuit, the futility of it as a project of revenge, its profound idleness as a scheme of recovering Lady Monson, guessing, as anyone could from my cousin's talk and from what Laura Jennings had let fall, that if Wilfrid *should* succeed in regaining his wife he wouldn't know what in the world to do with her!



## CHAPTER XIII.

## I INTERPRET THE WARNING.

THE strong wind blew throughout the day and the yacht made a gallant run, floating buoyant in foam from one blue knoll to another, with nothing living outside our decks saving a grey gull that overhung the seething line torn up by the furrow of our keel. A bright lookout was kept aloft; rarely did I send a glance that way but that I saw one or another of the men whose duty lay in overhanging the topgallant-yard sweeping the windy fallow sky against which the ridged horizon was beating, with Wilfrid's polished, lance-bright tube.

In the first dog-watch before we sat down to dinner the breeze thinned and the ocean flattened out into a softly-heaving surface flowing in folds of tender blue to the dark orange of the west, where lines of the hectic of the crimsoning orb hung like mouldy stains of blood. All cloths were crowded on our little ship, and when after dinner I came on deck I found her sliding through

the evening shadow, large and pale, like a body of moon-tinctured mist that floats off some great mountain-top and sails stately on the indigo-blue air, melting as it goes, as our canvas seemed to dissolve to the deepening of the dusk upon its full bosoms. A sailor was playing a concertina forward and a man was singing to it. Here and there upon the forecastle was a dim grouping of outlines with a scarlet tipping of the darkness by above half-a-score of well-sucked tobacco pipes, making one think of a constellation of fire-flies or of a cluster of riding lights.

I had asked Miss Jennings to join me on deck, but she declined on the plea—which two or three sneezes emphasised in the most reassuring way—that she felt chilly and was afraid of catching cold. Wilfrid produced his diary again, if a diary it was, and sat writing. I tried to court him into a walk and a smoke but he said no; he had a fancy for writing just then; it was a humour whose visits were somewhat rare, and therefore, the mood being on him, he wished to encourage it as he had a very great deal to commit to paper.

‘Well,’ said I, ‘I’ll just go and smoke one cigar, and then, with your permission, Miss Jennings, I’ll endeavour to win a sixpence from you at beggar-my-neighbour again, and you shall tell me my fortune once more.’

I yawned as I stepped on deck. Dull enough work, by George! thought I. Only think of this sort of thing lasting till we get to the Cape, with Wilfrid's intention that even by *that* time, if we don't fall in with the 'Shark,' little more than a beginning shall have been made! Let me once see the inside of Table Bay and her ladyship may go hang for any further pursuit that *I* shall be concerned in. The worst of it was that poor Wilfrid's troubles, warnings, health and the like, engrossed Miss Jennings. Nearly all our talk was about my cousin. I had hoped that the sunshine of her nature, that was bright in her laugh just as you seemed to see it glowing in her hair, would have somewhat cleared the gloom that Wilfrid cast upon our social atmosphere; but she seemed to lie under a kind of spell; it was keen womanly sympathy no doubt, beautiful for its sincerity, animated too by an honourable sensitiveness—by the feeling, I mean, that the runaway was her sister, and that she to that degree at least shared in the responsibility of the blow that had been dealt the poor fellow's fond and generous heart. All this was doubtless as it should be; nevertheless her qualities went to fashion a behaviour I could not greatly relish simply because it came between us. Her thoughts were so much with my cousin and her sister's wrong-doing, that the side of her I

was permitted to approach I found somewhat blind.

All was now quiet on deck; the concertina had ceased; the watch below had gone to bed; those who were on duty stowed themselves away in various parts, and sat, mere shapes of shadow, blending with the deep gloom betwixt the bulwarks, nodding but ready to leap to the first call. There were many shooting stars this night; one of them scored the heavens with a bright line that lingered a full ten minutes after the meteor had vanished in a puff of spangles, and it was so glittering as to find a clear reflection in the smooth of the swell where it writhed, broadened and contracted like a dim silver serpent of prodigious length. There was some dew in the air, and the sparkle of it upon the rail and skylight flashed crisply to the stars to the quiet rise and fall of the yacht upon the black invisible heave that yearned the whole length of her, with an occasional purr of froth at the cutwater, and a soft, rippling washing noise dying off astern into the gloom. The phosphorus in the sea was so plentiful that you might have thought yourself inside the tropics. It glared like sheet lightning under each ebony slope running westwards, and in every small play of froth there was the winking of it like the first scratching of lucifer matches.

Under the counter where the wake was the streaming of this light was like a thin sheathing of the water there with gold-beater's skin, rising and falling, and of a greenish tint, of the light of the moon. The flash of the sea-glow forward when the bow broke the swell would throw out the round of the staysail and jib as though the clear lens of a bull's-eye lamp had glanced upon the canvas. This greenish, baffling twinkling, this fading and flickering of flames over the side thickened the obscurity to the sight within the rails. Somehow, too, the mystic illumination seemed to deepen the stillness that lay upon the deep, spite of the welter and the breeze that had weight enough to lift a streak of foam here and there. It might be that the sight of those fires made one think of the crackling and noise of flame, so that the very dumbness of the burning lay like a hush upon the darkling surface with nothing aboard us to vex it, for our canvas swelled silent as if carved in mother-of-pearl, and not so much as the chafe of a rope or the stir of a sheave in its block fell from above to trouble the ear.

I spied a figure standing a foot or two before the main rigging, leaning over the side. Not knowing whether Finn or Crimp had the watch, and supposing this man to be one of them, I approached close and peered.

‘Is that you, captain?’ said I, for the shadow of the rigging was upon him to darken him yet.

‘No sir, it’s me, Mr. Monson. Muffin, sir.’

He had no need to mention his name, for his greasy, most remarkable voice, along with its indescribable tone of insincere habitual obsequiousness would have proclaimed him Muffin had he spoken as one of a crowd out of the bottom of a coal mine.

‘Feel sick?’ said I.

‘No, I am obliged to you, sir,’ he answered with a simper in his tone. ‘I am taking the liberty of breathing the hair just a little, sir.’

‘I suppose you’ll not be sorry to get home again, Muffin?’

‘Indeed, sir,’ he exclaimed, ‘I shall be most humbly thankful, I assure you.’

‘You’re an Englishman, aren’t you?’

‘Oh dear yes, quite English, sir. Born at ’ammersmith, sir.’

‘Then you ought to be very fond of the sea.’

‘I should be more partial to it, sir, I believe,’ said he, ‘if it was a river. I have a natural aversion to the hocean, sir. I can swim and I can row. I’ve pulled on the Serpentine, sir, and four years ago I made a voyage to the Continong as far as Cally, and found the water very hentertain-



ing. But there's so much hocean here, sir, that it's alarming to think of. On a river, Mr. Monson, sir, one can never seem distant, but here — why, sir, if my mother's 'ouse was in one of them stars, it couldn't seem further off, and every day I suppose 'll make the distance greater.'

'That you must expect,' said I, turning with a notion of seeking Finn or Crimp.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' he said, 'but could you tell me what them fires are that's burning in the water?'

'Phosphorus,' said I.

'Phosphorus?' he ejaculated as though startled, 'hoh, indeed sir! And might I venture to ask why it is that the water don't put it out?'

'There are more kinds of fire than one,' said I, laughing, and not much relishing the prostrative nature of the fellow's respectfulness I walked aft.

Close to a boat that hung inboards by the davits, only a few strides from where Muffin was standing, I spied another figure standing with his back against the rail. It proved to be Mr. Jacob Crimp.

'Plenty of fire in the water to-night,' said I.

'Is there?' he answered, slowly rounding his sturdy little figure to look. 'I ain't took notice.'

'Have you followed the sea many years, Mr.

Crimp?' said I, feeling the need of a chat, and willing moreover to humour the quizzical mood that commonly came to me when I conversed with this sour little chap.

'Thirty year.'

'A long spell!'

'Sight too long.'

'I suppose you'll be settling down ashore soon?'

'Ay, if I ain't drowned. *Then* settling ashore with me 'll sinnify a hole in the airth.'

'Come, come,' said I, 'after thirty years of hard labour there 'll be surely dollars enough for a clean shirt and a roof. But you may be married, though?'

'No I ain't,' he answered with a snap like cocking a gun.

'Well, a sailor is a fool to get married,' said I. 'Why should a man burthen himself with a wife whose society he cannot enjoy, with whom he accepts all the obligations of a home without the privilege of occupying it, save for a few weeks at a time?'

'Well, I ain't married, so I don't care. It's nothen to me what other men do. Talk o' settling! If you come to my berth I'll show you the fruits of thirty year of sea sarvice; an old chest, a soot or two of clothes, and 'bout as much ready cash as 'ud

purchase a dose of ratsbane.' Here emotion choked him and he remained silent.

At this moment a low, mocking, most extraordinary laugh came out of the blackness upon the sea in the direction I happened to be gazing in. The sound was a distinct *ha! ha! ha!* and before the derisive, hollow, mirthless note had fairly died off the ear, a brisk angry voice within apparently a pistol shot of us exclaimed, '*That yacht is cursed!*' A laugh like the first followed and then all was still.

Crimp started, and I was grateful to heaven he did so, since it was an assurance the noise had been no imagination of my own. I will not deny that I felt exceedingly frightened. My legs trembled like an up-and-down lead line in a strong tideway. It was not only the suddenness, the unexpectedness of such a thing; it was the combination of deep gloom upon the waters, the play of the phosphoric fires there, the oppressive mystery of the sombre vastness stretching from over our rail as it seemed to the immeasurably remote dim lights of heaven lying low upon the edge of the ocean, and languishing in the darkness there.

'Did you hear it?' I cried in a subdued voice to Crimp.

'Ay,' responded the man in a startled voice. 'I don't see anything. Do you?'

I peered my hardest. 'Nothing,' I exclaimed. 'Hush, the cry may be repeated.'

We strained our eyes and ears too, but all was silent; nor was there any livelier sparkle in the liquid dusk to indicate the dip of an oar, or the stirring of the fiery water by a boat's stem.

'Did the fellow at the wheel hear it, think you?' said I.

We both stepped aft, the mate looking to right and left, and even up at the stars overhead as though he feared something would tumble down upon us out of the dark air. He approached the man who was at the helm and said, 'Thomas, did you hear anybody a-laughing like just now out on the quarter there?'

'No,' answered the man.

'Are ye a bit deaf?'

'Ne'er a bit.'

'And you mean to say you heard *nothen*?'

'Nothen.'

Grumbling with astonishment and perplexity, Crimp turned to me. 'If it wur fancy,' he muttered, 'call me a dawg's flea.'

I believed I could see Muffin's figure still leaning over the rail. Had he heard the voice? As I passed the skylight I looked down and perceived him standing with drooped head and folded arms before Wilfrid in the cabin. My cousin

appeared to be giving him some instructions. Advancing yet a little I discovered that what I had taken to be the valet's figure was merely a coil of rope on a pin, the outline of which was blackened up and enlarged to the proportions and even the posture of a human shape by the illusive character of the obscurity made by the shrouds just there. I threw my half-finished cigar overboard.

‘Enough to make a man feel as if he'd like to be turned in,’ said Crimp. ‘It's gone blooming cold, han't it?’

‘It's the most puzzling thing that ever happened to me,’ said I; ‘but of course if we were in the secret we should find nothing wonderful in it. In the West Indian waters, you know, there is a fish to be caught that talks well enough to put a ship about. Who's to tell in a midnight blackness of this sort what amazing marine thing may not rise to the surface and utter sounds which an alarmed ear would easily interpret into something confoundedly unpleasant?’

‘What did it say?’ inquired Crimp.

‘Why, after the laugh, “*that yacht's cursed,*” then another laugh. So it seemed to me,’ said I, with my eyes going blind against the blackness whence the noise had proceeded.

‘That's just what I heard,’ said Crimp gruffly,

‘ exactly them words. Two ears ain’t a going to get the same meaning out of what’s got no sense in it to start with.’

‘ Pooh,’ I exclaimed, mentally protesting against an argument that was much too forcible to be soothing, ‘ what could it have been, man, if it were not, say, some great bird, mayhap, flapping past us unseen, and uttering notes which, since they sounded the same to you and me, would have sounded the same to the whole ship’s company had they been on deck listening?’

‘ Beats all my going a-fishing anyhow,’ growled Crimp, going to the rail and looking over.

‘ Well, take my advice and don’t speak of it,’ said I; ‘ you’ll only get laughed at, especially as the fellow at the wheel heard nothing.’

‘ His starboard ear’s caulked; he’s hard o’ hearing,’ rumbled Crimp.

I walked to the taffrail and looked astern. There was nothing to be seen but faint phantasmal sheets of phosphoric light softly undulating, with the brighter glow of our wake. I was really more agitated than I should have liked to own, and I must have stood for nearly a quarter of an hour speculating upon the incident and striving to reassure myself. One thought led to another and presently I found myself starting to a sudden odd suspicion that came into my head with the vivid



gleam of a broad space of the sea-glow that flashed out bright as though it reflected a lantern hung over the side from the run of the yacht where the bends hollowed in from the sternpost. It was a suspicion that had no reference whatever to the voice that Crimp and I had heard, yet it did me good by drawing my mind away from that bit of preternaturalism, and a few minutes later I found myself below alongside of Miss Jennings.

‘The cigar you lighted to-night must have been an unusually big one,’ said she with a light glance, in which, however, it was easy to see that she noted my expression was something different from what was usual in me.

I smiled, and measuring on my finger, told her that I had smoked but that much of the cigar and thrown the rest of it overboard. Wilfrid sat at the table with a tumbler of seltzer and brandy before him, and he was filling his large meerschaum pipe as I arrived.

‘Help yourself, Charles,’ said he, pointing to the swing tray that was full of decanters. ‘I was about to join you on deck. How goes the night?’

‘Dark, but fine; the wind just a small pleasant air. I am tired, or I should accompany you.’

‘We are sailing though, I hope,’ said he.

‘Ay, some four knots or thereabouts, and heading our course. We have no right to grumble. It has blown a fine gale all day, and from the hour of our start down to the present moment I think we have had fairer weather and brisker breezes than we had a right to hope for.’

He emptied his tumbler, lighted his pipe, and said that he would go and take a turn or two. ‘If I should loiter,’ he added, ‘don’t sit up. If I am not to sleep when I turn in, the night will be all too long for me were I to go to bed at four o’clock in the morning.’

As he mounted the cabin steps I rose to mix a glass of seltzer and brandy, and when I returned to my seat near Miss Jennings, she at once said, ‘I hope nothing has happened to worry you, Mr. Monson?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘You had a slightly troubled look when you came into the cabin just now.’

‘What will you think,’ said I, ‘if I tell you that *I* have had a warning?’

Her eyes glittered to the rounding of the brows, and her lips parted as though with a sigh of surprise. I shook my head, looking with a smile at her. ‘I see how it is. If I am candid, you will think there are *two* instead of one!’

‘No, no,’ she cried.

I was in the midst of telling her about the voice Crimp and I had heard when Muffin passed through the cabin, seemingly from his own berth on his way to his master's. He held a little parcel of some kind. On arriving at the opening of the short alley or corridor that divided the after berths, he stopped, looked round, and said in his humblest manner, 'I beg your pardon, sir, but *is* the bayronet in his cabin, d'ye know, sir?'

'He's on deck,' I answered.

'Thank you, sir,' he exclaimed, and vanished. I proceeded with my story and finished it.

'It must have been some trick of the hearing, Mr. Monson,' exclaimed the girl; 'some sea-fowl winging slowly past, as you suggest, or—it is impossible to say. I can speak from experience. Often I have been alone and have heard my name called so distinctly that I have started and looked round, though there might have been nobody within a mile of me. The senses are conjurors; they are perpetually playing one tricks, and, which is very mortifying, with the simplest appliances.'

'True enough that, Miss Jennings. The creak of a door will be a murdered man's groan sometimes. I remember once being at a country house and holding a pistol in my hand ready to

cover the figure of a man that was watching the old-fashioned building with burglarious intentness; which same man, after I had stood staring at him for a long twenty minutes, was resolved by the crawl of the moonshine into his original fabric and proportions of a neatly-clipped bush. No; I shall not suffer that mysterious voice to sink very deep. It was passing strange and that's all. I hope sour old Crimp has some sense of the ridiculous and will keep his mouth shut. Heaven deliver us if he should take it upon himself to tell Wilfrid a mysterious sea-voice sung out just now that this yacht was cursed !'

I rose with a glance at the skylight. 'Excuse me for a few minutes. I am going to Wilfrid's cabin to confirm a suspicion that has entered my head. Should my cousin arrive whilst I am absent, endeavour to detain him here until I return. I shall know how to excuse myself for entering his bedroom.'

She looked at me wonderingly, but asked no questions. I walked swiftly but softly to the corridor aft. Wilfrid's cabin was on the port side. It was the aftermost berth, two cabins there having been knocked into one. I turned the handle of the door and entered. The flame of a silver-bright bracket lamp filled the place with light. It was a very handsome sea apartment,

with no lack of mirrors, hangings, small costly furniture, all designed for the comfort and happiness of her ladyship. I nimbly closed the door behind me and stood for an instant beholding the precise spectacle I had entered fully expecting to witness. It was Muffin, who stood close against the bulkhead at the foot of the bunk my cousin occupied, grasping in his left hand a small white jar such as might be used for jam, whilst in the other hand he flourished a brush, with which he was apparently painting or scoring marks upon the bulkhead as I entered. The occasional kick of the rudder, with frequent creaking, straining noises arising from the movement of the yacht, hindered him from hearing me turn the handle of the door and from being conscious of my presence, whilst I stood looking on. He had made some progress with his mysterious lettering; for, having dipped the brush into the jar, he fell to writing a big B after several preliminary flourishes of his arm as though he had a mind to give an artistic curve to the letter; he was then beginning to paint a small A, though the brush left no mark, when I exclaimed, ‘How many b’s are there in baby?’

He looked round slowly, keeping his right hand nevertheless lifted, and preserving his posture in all save the turn of his head as though he had

been blasted into motionlessness by a flash of lightning. I walked up to him :

‘ So,’ said I, ‘ *you* are the warning, eh ? *You* are the mysterious fiery message which has distracted my cousin for the last two days and nights, and which, if continued, must end in driving him mad ? You scoundrel ! ’

He faced round, his right hand slowly sinking to his side like a pump-handle gradually settling. For a moment there was a look of malevolent defiance in his face, but it yielded to one of consternation, terror, eager entreaty.

‘ Mr. Monson, sir,’ he exclaimed in a voice that was the very double-distilled extract of oily accent, ‘ I am discovered, sir. I meant the honourable bayronet no ’arm. My ’umble wish is to get ’ome.’

‘ What is that stuff you have there ? ’

‘ A remedy for wermin, sir, which they told me was numerous on board ship.’

‘ Open that porthole ! ’

He did so after giving me a look as if he suspected I meant to squeeze him overboard through the aperture.

‘ Out now with that pot and brush.’

He tossed them into the sea. I turned down the lamp till only the feeblest glimmer of flame remained, and then sure enough there stole out



upon the bulkhead in a feeble, green, glittering crawling that seemed to wink upon the sight with its coming and going the words '*Return to Ba—*.'

'Rub that off at once,' said I, 'and be quick about it too. If Sir Wilfrid arrives I shall have to explain; and he's a man to shoot you for such an act as this.'

He pulled a pocket handkerchief out of his coat-tail and fell to rubbing the bulkhead with a terrified hand, backing to see if the letters were gone, then applying himself afresh, breathing hard meanwhile and manifesting much fear, for no doubt he believed that my hint that Wilfrid would shoot him was very well founded, seeing that he had a half crazy man to deal with in his master. He rubbed till nothing was left of the letters. I turned up the lamp and ordered him out of the cabin. He was about to address me.

'Not a word,' I cried, subduing my voice, for though my temper was such that I could scarce keep my hands off him, yet I was exceedingly anxious too that Wilfrid should not overhear me nor come to his berth and find me in it with his valet. 'Get away forward now to your own cabin.'

'For God's sake, Mr. Monson, don't tell Sir

Wilfrid, sir,' he exclaimed, in a hoarse, broken tone.

'Away with you! I promise nothing. This is a matter to think over. I shall require to talk with you in the morning.'

I held open the cabin door and he passed out in a sideways fashion as if he feared I should hit him, and then travelled swiftly forwards with such a twinkling of the white socks bulging over his pumps as made me believe he ran. My cousin was still on deck. Miss Jennings gazed at me earnestly; I looked to see if the coast was clear, and exclaimed: 'It proved as I had supposed. I have interpreted the warning Wilfrid has received.'

She gazed at me in silence.

'The mysterious handwriting is Muffin's,' I continued. 'The flaming admonition is wrought by a brush dipped in a phosphoric composition for—for—beetles!'

'You mean to say, Mr. Monson——' She paused to a long breath whilst her eyes shone with astonishment.

'The long and short of it is, Miss Jennings,' said I, 'that our friend Muffin hates the sea; he has been cursing the voyage from the bottom of his soul pretty nearly ever since we started, and has hit upon this device to appeal to Wilfrid's

instincts as a father and to his poor, weak, credulous nerves as—as—well as a man not wholly sound, in the hope, not ill-founded, that provided the warning be repeated often enough, my cousin *would* return to baby.’

‘The horrid wretch! You actually found him——?’

‘Yes, he had got as far as *Return to Ba—*.’

‘Shall you tell Wilfrid?’

‘No,’ I answered, ‘not a word must be said to him on the subject. I told Muffin—and I believe in my own notion too—that if my cousin were to hear that the sufferings occasioned him by the mysterious writing on his cabin wall were due to a trick of his valet, he would pistol the scoundrel. No, we must keep our counsel. I shall confer with Finn in the morning and contrive that our melancholy humourist be wholly and effectually sundered henceforth from all intercourse with this end of the yacht.’

Well, she was thunderstruck, and could hardly be brought to credit that a servant should play his master so cruel a trick. I told her that in my opinion Muffin would do well as keeper of a private lunatic asylum, since so artful a wretch might be warranted to drive anyone whose nerves were not ‘laid up’ with galvanised iron strands into a condition of sullen imbecility or clamorous lunacy

within any time specified by the friends and relatives of the sufferer. When, however, the pretty creature's surprise had somewhat abated, she expressed herself as wonderfully grateful that the discovery had been so early made. 'Had the writing been continued,' she said, 'I am sure it would have ended in completely crazing poor Wilfrid. And I am glad too for another reason, Mr. Monson—it proves at all events that there was nothing insane in your cousin's fancy of a warning. After all, the healthiest-minded person would be startled and dismayed, and afterwards, perhaps, dangerously affected, by finding a reference to his baby shining out upon him in the dark, night after night'

'I believe I should have got up and rubbed the reference out,' said I, 'had it glimmered upon me.'

'But you are not Wilfrid. What made you suspect Muffin?'

'I suspected not Muffin, but a trick, and *then* that Muffin must be the man. It came to me with the sight of a bright sheet of phosphoric fire flaming off the yacht's quarter as I overhung the rail, staring into the gloom and puzzling over the cry Crimp and I had heard. One can't give a reason for the visitations of fancy. Instinct I take to be the soul's forefinger with which it points out things to the reason.'

‘I hope it will point to the true cause of the mysterious voice you heard,’ she exclaimed, smiling, but with something of uneasiness in her face nevertheless.

We continued chatting a little; she then went to her cabin. Soon after she had withdrawn, Wilfrid arrived. He yawned, and without seating himself spoke of the weather, the yacht’s progress, and other common-place matters. For my part I had too much on my mind just then to feel in the humour to detain him, so after a few sentences as carelessly spoken as I could manage, I advised him after his sleepless nights to try once more for a spell of rest, and so saying went away to my own berth.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

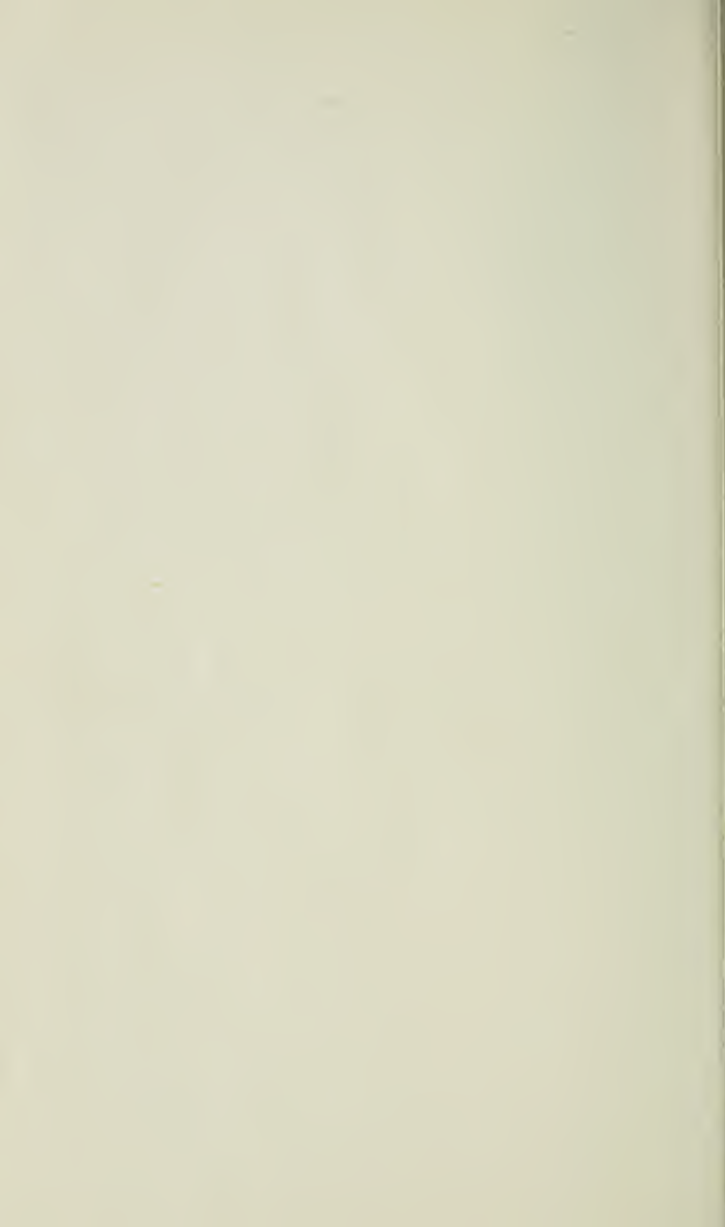
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